

PARADISE INTO WASTELAND:
SOME NOVELS OF THE 1920s.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	PREFACE	iii
	ABSTRACT	iv
	INTRODUCTION	1
I	1. THE AMERICAN DREAM	7
	2. THE MOOD OF THE 1920s	19
	Normalcy	21
	Intolerance	27
	Prohibition	32
	"Ballyhoo"	36
	Manners and Morals	43
	"The Revolt of the Highbrows"	51
	3. URBANISM: NEW YORK CITY IN THE 1920s	56
II	CALL IT SLEEP	66
III	A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN	75
IV	THE GREAT GATSBY	93
V	MANHATTAN TRANSFER	105
VI	BUTTERFIELD 8	120
VII	JEWS WITHOUT MONEY	133
VIII	MISS LONELYHEARTS	149
IX	CONCLUSION	166
	APPENDIX	176
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	182

PREFACE

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ABSTRACT

The American 1920s is a period too often treated without roots and this, combined with a tendency to romanticize its history, has distorted the meaning of the decade. In order to rectify this falsification, a new conceptual frame of reference, the American Dream, is used to locate the decade as a distinct period and as a part of America's total civilization. The American Dream is, therefore, defined and interpreted, and then related to the decade's 'mood' which is structured around 'Normalcy,' Intolerance, Prohibition, 'Ballyhoo,' Manners and Morals, and 'The Revolt of the Highbrows.' The urban nature of the decade is vital and New York City is used to provide a proper forum that is in turn tested by reference to seven novels (CALL IT SLEEP, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, THE GREAT GATSBY, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, BUTTERFIELD 8, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY and MISS LONELYHEARTS) set in New York City during the period and functioning mainly as mirrors of social history. The increase in the breadth and depth of understanding that results from this interdisciplinary approach makes a valid contribution to the established understanding of the period because it clarifies the decade's complexity and concludes that: the decade is still in need of revision; as the 'top of the world,' New York City is a valid place from which the American Dream can be examined; in combination, the American Dream and New York City depict the 1920s as the front door to modern chaos: the setting of the

novels is powerful but there is no other base with which it can be compared; and the novelists dramatically modify the historical perspective of the decade by expelling its surface glamour and emotionalism, establishing an accurately moderate atmosphere instead. The most important conclusion is, however, that as a result of this entire process, the United States of America was transformed from Paradise into Wasteland.

INTRODUCTION

In one of the most recent texts dealing with the 1920s, Joan Hoff Wilson's THE TWENTIES: THE CRITICAL ISSUES,¹ the state of the decade's historiography is dramatized by a citation attributed to the socialist, journalist, and politician, McAlister Coleman. As early as 1931, Coleman had implored Clio, the muse of history, to be benevolent towards future generations of historians and their attempts to write about the decade. These historians, he admonished, "will be confronted with such a mass of contradictory evidence on the state of the American nation ... as to make them believe they had somehow got hold of a bottle of cut Scotch, one of the chief products of the lauded mass production of that epoch."² Beginning with Frederick Lewis Allen's frothy, if informal depiction of the events between the Big Parade and Black Thursday,³ successive histories have devoted themselves to making the decade appear as intoxicating as possible. Along with other factors, this has resulted in an interpretative heritage of confusion, contradiction, naiveté, and, in many cases, superficiality.⁴

1. Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), THE TWENTIES: THE CRITICAL ISSUES, (Boston, 1972), p.vii.

2. Ibid.

3. Frederick Lewis Allen, ONLY YESTERDAY: AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES, (New York, 1964).

4. One of the earliest exceptions to this rule was the Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, RECENT SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES, two volumes, (Westport, Connecticut, 1970). Although many of its conclusions were inaccurate, RECENT SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES, first published in 1933, is the most substantial study of American society during the period.

Foremost among these factors has been the tendency to insist upon periodization. The 1920s, therefore, become anything that occurred between 1919 on the one hand, and either 1929 or 1932 on the other. This malpractice was so common that, before the 1950s, the decade was seldom, if ever, defined in other than chronological terms.⁵ Consequently, the 1920s was too often treated as a decade without roots. Subsequently, it has been one of the major tasks of the revisionists to show that the period not only had a present, but also a past, and, perhaps more importantly, a future.⁶

Another significant agent influencing the general inability to deal adequately with the 1920s has been the failure of its interpreters to appreciate the quite simple fact that the period is not an easy one to package and preserve. The 1920s were dynamic. But they were also multifaceted and have been subject to diverse critical interpretation. After cautioning that calm study of the period is virtually impossible, and that less

5. Full treatment of this argument can be found in Professor Henry F. May's now standard "Shifting Perspectives on the 1920s," MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW, Volume XLIII, Number 3, (December, 1956), pp.405-427. May's article should be supplemented by reference to Burl Noggle's "The Twenties: A New Historiographical Frontier," JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY, Volume LIII, Number 2, (September, 1966), pp.299-314.

6. Two of the most significant works in this respect are Arthur Mann's provocative study, LA GUARDIA, A FIGHTER AGAINST HIS TIMES, 1882-1933, (Chicago, 1969), and Leon Baritz' highly competent assessment, "The Culture of the Twenties," in Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner (eds.), THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMERICAN CULTURE, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970), pp.150-178

impassioned studies are needed, Henry May holds that "the cultural battles of the twenties have been fought again and again. Successive writers have found it necessary either to condemn or to praise the decade, though what they have seen to condemn or praise has differed."⁷ The outcome of this compulsion is that there has been little in the way of consistency or overall coherence.

There is, however, a critical consonance that the 1920s, conflict, and controversy, are interchangeable synonyms.⁸ This consensus is wholly legitimate. Indeed, in an age that William E. Leuchtenburg characterizes as "the first serious attempt by Americans to make their peace with the twentieth century,"⁹ the convention that the period represented a "deep chasm"¹⁰ is both natural and appropriate. There was a sharp breach between agrarianism and urbanism, but the parties to this schism have been misleadingly oversimplified. Formed by small-town, rural, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, the first

7. May, op.cit., p.416

8. This claim is substantiated by Henry May and Burl Noggle in particular (see footnote 5). Further verification of this point can be found in John D. Hicks' "Research Opportunities in the 1920s," HISTORIAN, Volume XXV, (November, 1962), pp.1-13. Hicks argues that nearly every aspect of the 1920s is open to serious questioning and that there is need for new and independent research in terms of what has already been accomplished, as well as what has not.

9. Cited by Richard Lowitt, "Prosperity Decade, 1917-1928," Chapter 14, pp.231-263, in William H. Cartwright and Richard I. Watson (eds.), INTERPRETING AND TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY, (Washington, D.C., 1961), p.232.

10. May, op.cit., p.416

alliance is said to have made the decade an intolerant one. In juxtaposition, the second group was city-oriented, ethnically diverse, and customarily accredited with the period's experimentation and radicalism. The existence of the schism is indisputable. What is questionable, however, is the basically urban-rural division of the parties involved. This important point has eluded most of the decade's interpreters, even though the scholar who first polarized rural against urban, Louis Wirth,¹¹ subsequently revised his stand by acknowledging that urban and rural were non-polar concepts.¹²

Instead, the 1920s should be seen as a battleground involving what Spiller and others identify as "the curious separation between America as a geographical, political, and social entity, and America as a state of mind."¹³ It is, therefore, necessary to advance a new conceptual analysis for evaluating the decade. For this purpose the most accurate anchor is the American Dream which appraises the decade at the same time that it makes the

11. Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life." THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, Volume XLIV, Number 1, (July, 1938), pp.1-24.

12. Louis Wirth, "Rural-Urban Differences," in Albert J. Reiss Jr., ON CITIES AND SOCIAL LIFE: SELECTED PAPERS, (Chicago, 1964), pp.221-225, Rural-urban demarcation was further obscured during the 1920s by a combination of technological developments and the increasing sophistication of the mass media.

13. Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas J. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, and Richard M. Ludwig (eds.), LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES: HISTORY, (London, 1969), p.206.

period meaningful in terms of the total craft of American civilization.

In order to achieve this design, the origins, the development, and the status of the American Dream in the 1920s must first be defined and interpreted. This will then be related to the 'Mood' of the 1920s, the essential structure of which included: 'Normalcy,' Intolerance, Prohibition, 'Ballyhoo,' Manners and Morals, and 'The Revolt of the Highbrows.' The urban nature of the decade is equally important. In turn, this aspect will be given separate attention so that the degree to which the components of the decade were retained, if not celebrated in the urban environment, can be determined. For this purpose, New York City has been selected as a critical testing ground. Being both typical and atypical of what might be deemed 'American,' this particular city is important to the 1920s in a manner that cannot be overstated, parochial sympathies towards Chicago notwithstanding.

To substantiate further the claims made by this stage, the above-mentioned elements of the 1920s will then be tested by reference to seven novels¹⁴ which are set in

14. John Dos Passos, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Fourth Printing, Sentry Edition, no given date.

F.Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973.

Michael Gold, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY, New York: International Publishers, 1935.

John O'Hara, BUTTERFIELD 8, New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1969.

Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, New York: Cooper Square Publishers Inc., 1970.

Betty Smith, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1968.

Nathanael West, MISS LONELYHEARTS & THE DAY OF THE LOCUST, New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1969. THE DAY OF THE LOCUST is not included in this thesis.

Unless otherwise stated, all references used in this thesis are taken from the editions here cited.

New York City during the approximate period of the 1920s. The physical and chronological locations have, of course, played a large part in determining the choice of the novels to be studied. Furthermore, they conform to an 'acceptable' artistic standard. While their major function is, in this case, a mirroring of social history, it must, however, be stated that they were not selected to prove or disprove any of the contentions that this study advances. It is the novels themselves that are at work, and not the critic per se.¹⁵

15. In the selection of the novels, I am grateful for the generous advice given me by: Dr. Alfred Kazin of the State University of New York at Stony Brook; Professors William E. Leuchtenburg, Kenneth T. Jackson, and Joseph W. Ridgeley of Columbia University, New York; Professors John Hope Franklin, Barry Karl and Arthur Mann of the University of Chicago, Illinois; and Professor Robert H. Walker of George Washington University, Washington, D.C. The ultimate responsibility for the opinions expressed in this theses is, of course, entirely my own.

CHAPTER I

THE AMERICAN DREAM

One of the deepest convictions of the Americans is the almost indisputable existence of the American Dream, a vision that has led the eminent critic, Lionel Trilling, to claim that "Ours is the only nation that prides itself upon a dream and gives its name to one, 'The American Dream.'"¹ Indeed, American life has been both defined and dominated by this ideal, and the American Dream is a fundamental if not unique component in the nation's cultural heritage. The substance of the Dream is, however, elusive, and it is probable that there are as many American Dreams as there are American dreamers. Nonetheless, in a land whose history is "so profoundly and stubbornly unique that the very word 'America' remains a new, almost completely undefined and controversial proper noun"² - the Dream does serve as an index to American civilization. Indeed, the American Dream is such a suitable guide to the mysteries of America that it has become an accepted instrument for critical appraisal. In THE URGENT WEST: THE AMERICAN DREAM AND MODERN MAN, for example, Walter Allen makes the simple yet pertinent

1. Lionel Trilling, cited in Walter E. Allen, THE URGENT WEST: THE AMERICAN DREAM AND MODERN MAN, (New York, 1969), p.3.

2. James Baldwin, NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME: MORE NOTES OF A NATIVE SON, (London, 1967), p.17.

statement that "The American Dream is a shaping force that makes the fate of being American less complex."³

The American Dream serves as an apt indicator for evaluating the nation that takes its name. Less agreeable, however, have been the attempts by critics to pinpoint the Dream's geneology. Robert E. Spiller and others, in their highly authoritative LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, suggest that, in its origins at least, the American Dream, as such, pre-empted actual discovery of the continent:

"As a state of mind and a dream, America had existed long before its discovery. Ever since the early days of Western civilization, peoples had dreamed of a Lost Paradise, of a Golden Age, characterized by abundance, absence of war, and absence of toil. With the first accounts of the New World, it was felt that these dreams and yearnings had become a fact, a geographical reality, fraught with unlimited possibilities."⁴

In fact the majority of early observers saw America as a boundless and generous land in which a literal and figurative 'Nature's Garden'⁵ rapidly became established

3. Walter E. Allen, op.cit., p.235. In another of his works, TRADITION AND DREAM: THE ENGLISH AND AMERICAN NOVEL FROM THE TWENTIES TO OUR OWN TIME, (London, 1964), Allen further clarifies this point by suggesting that the American Dream can be used to define a 'new man' in a 'New World.' Indeed, America is a promised land peopled by men and women who had, supposedly, opted out of 'Old World' society, and, like Huck Finn, would go off into the 'Territory' rather than be civilized by Aunt Sally. See pp.xi-xxii.

4. Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas J. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, and Richard M. Ludwig (eds.) LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES: HISTORY, (London, 1969), p.192. Extensions and variations of what is meant by the American Dream can be found in the same text, pp.192-215.

5. For further development of this concept, as well as a provocative assessment of subsequent obstacles to it, see Leo Marx, THE MACHINE IN THE GARDEN: TECHNOLOGY AND THE PASTORAL IDEAL IN AMERICA, (New York, 1964).

as a stock image, and pessimistic perspectives proved to be the exception rather than the rule.⁶ Because initial depictions were so exuberant, the line between fact and fantasy was at times thinly drawn. Indeed, the early Americans felt themselves to be somehow compelled towards a life that was as lusty and spontaneous as it was primitive, and, in celebrating this, they invested it with a quality of thought and emotion that can, perhaps, only be described as mythic. From its inception, then, the American Dream can seem to be little more than the American Mirage.⁷

Even so, it appeared that the 'Old World' was to have another, possibly a final chance to rebuild the city of man. In this sense it is appropriate to turn to what is customarily considered to be the first formal definition of the American Dream, John Winthrop's classic sermon,

6. Spiller et al, op.cit., p.193

7. This is a contentious point developed mostly, if not completely, out of hindsight. It is quite legitimate to claim that even if it was only a mirage, America, to the 'Old World', functioned as the Western frontier was supposed to have done for Easterners, as a safety-valve. For treatment of the 'frontier hypothesis' see Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), reprinted in THE FRONTIER IN AMERICAN HISTORY, (New York, 1920). The frontier may or may not have shaped American character but it is legitimate to claim that it did reinforce the sense of plenty. There is, therefore, a marked degree of significance behind Walter Allen's claim that "The frontier, the movement westward, remains the great image of the American sense of possibility. As such it is one of the main components of the American Dream, one might say America as dream." THE URGENT WEST, op.cit., p.58

'A Model For Christian Charity.' In this homily Winthrop wrote,

"Men shall say of succeeding plantacions:
the Lord make it like that of New England
for wee must consider that wee shall be as
a citty uppon a Hill, the eies of all
peoples are uppon us." 8

Winthrop's apparent intention was to formulate a blueprint for the effective foundation of a 'way of life' with an intimate relationship between it and the place in which it was lived. America, he proposed, would become a moral example to the world,⁹ with a covenant of unity for the people who would, collectively, form a community of visible saints. The sermon was significant, therefore, in that it bolstered the American Dream by unequivocally formalizing the faith that God was on the side of America,

8. Cited in Loren Baritz, CITY ON A HILL: A HISTORY OF MYTHS AND IDEAS IN AMERICA, (New York, 1964), p.3. This authoritative study traces the continuity of the American concept of a city on a hill.

9. Winthrop seemed unaware of the dangers involved in attempting to create such a moral example. The alternative could be moral disgrace, a point shrewdly highlighted by Loren Baritz' declaration that, in this case, "The organic and independent Christian corporation owed its existence to a concession from the natural King, but its meaning to God. The terms of the national covenant had exempted the saints from history, had given them the opportunity to build their exemplary city on a hill. Should they remain faithful to their God, that city would thrive and prosper to the end of time. Should they fail, and there was mounting evidence that they would, the extraordinary blessing of the Lord would turn into an extraordinary curse ... It was becoming painfully clear for those with eyes to see that the cosmic 'errand into the wilderness' was failing. The Charter was revoked, and the new Charter of 1691 made property, not piety, the necessary qualification for freemanship. Saints had become Yankees. So terrible was the wrath of the Lord." Baritz, op.cit., p.44.

and would protect it.¹⁰ The outgrowth of this belief was equally important: Winthrop's 'Model' reinforced in the American Dream not only the sense of possibility, but also, because of the requirement to be visibly elect, the need for display.

Winthrop's ideas were never fully realized because the 'New World' meant different things to different people.¹¹ In this sense it is standard practice to cite Benjamin Franklin as the illustrative symbol for the corruption of Winthrop's Utopia. Franklin's America was abundant and, in his inventive hands, its possibilities

10. Indeed, the concept of a protected Wilderness Zion was the central image in Winthrop's sermon. The model for his Zion is taken from a hill in Jerusalem, around which the City of David was built. The City of David was a place of worship built upon a solid, sacred rock, the Sakhra. Jews, Christians, and Muslims revere this as the omphalos of the world. It is said to be eighteen miles closer to Heaven than any other part of the globe and is governed by various traditions; it was visited two thousand years before Adam was created, and the visitors were Angels; Noah's Ark is said to have rested on the Rock after the deluge; it is one of the rocks of Paradise; all the sweet water of the earth is supposed to originate somewhere beneath it; the Rock is daily surrounded by seventy thousand angels who form a bodyguard. For further reference see H.A.R.Gibb and J.H.Kramers, THE SHORTER ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ISLAM. (Leiden, 1953).

11. This point is illustrated in general texts such as Carl N. Degler's OUT OF OUR PAST: THE FORCES THAT SHAPED MODERN AMERICA, (New York, 1962), and in specialized assessments of Colonial and post-Colonial New England, examples being: Perry Miller, ERRAND INTO THE WILDERNESS, (New York, 1964), and Benjamin Franklin, THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND SELECTED WRITINGS, (New York, 1950).

were unbound. He was,

"a man able to control and play with a force of nature which had filled with awe countless generations ... he appeared as the most striking illustration of the unlimited possibilities residing in the 'people', a poor boy who may seize opportunities and rise to positions reserved to privileged classes in the old world." 12

In functioning as a dramatic metaphor for American perfectibility, Franklin exemplified the 'mythical' tradition of the economic possibilities in the American Dream and deified the legendary cult of the American Adam whose existence was made compound by the dreams, the desirability, the opportunity, and perhaps even the moral inevitability of success: from any angle, this representation was central to America's comity of abundance.¹³ As was the case with his own creation, Poor Richard,¹⁴ Franklin could learn the art of cultivating riches and, therefore, realize the dream he was entitled to enjoy by virtue of his citizenship.

This very citizenship forms what some critics¹⁵ see

12. Spiller et al, op.cit., p.201.

13. The exploitation of abundance, particularly of land, has created what David Potter, in his standard and provocative study, labels 'People of Plenty.' See David M. Potter, PEOPLE OF PLENTY: ECONOMIC ABUNDANCE AND THE AMERICAN CHARACTER, (Chicago, 1968).

14. Franklin, op.cit., see 'Poor Richard's Almanac,' pp.208-226. The Almanac is a guide to 'The Way to Wealth.'

15. For examples of works that treat the American Dream and American Democracy as one and the same, see in particular: Wesley F. Craven, THE LEGEND OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS, (New York, 1965); Charles S. Sydnor, AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARIES IN THE MAKING: POLITICAL PRACTICES IN WASHINGTON'S VIRGINIA, (Toronto, 1965); and Richard M. Hofstadter, THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION AND THE MEN WHO MADE IT, (London, 1967). Hofstadter stresses that anyone, even the poorest boy, could become America's President.

as the essence of the American Dream, American Democracy.¹⁶ From the time of the Founding Fathers there has been a tradition that the spirit of American liberty explicitly incorporates what Walter Lippmann has called the 'Golden Rule,' that is, "the moral maxim which establishes itself when man recognizes others as autonomous persons, when they acknowledge the inalienable manhood of other men."¹⁷ As synonyms America and Democracy functioned as a new force that derived its conventions from the Declaration of Independence and Jeffersonianism. Indeed, after the American Revolution, "The United States stood no longer as engaged in an unprecedented and venturesome experiment: the experiment had been conducted in a gigantic laboratory, and it was an enormous success."¹⁸ This conviction has been a sustaining vision in American life and, despite evidence to the contrary¹⁹ was accepted

16. The most comprehensive single treatment of the development and nature of American Democracy and the American political tradition can be found in Marion D. Irish and James W. Prothero, THE POLITICS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968).

17. Walter Lippmann, THE GOOD SOCIETY, (Boston, 1943), p.337. Significantly, Lippmann's next sentence reads "The rule is meaningless when that recognition is absent." Ibid.

18. Spiller et al, op.cit., p.210.

19. See, for example, Merrill D. Peterson, "The Jeffersonian Heritage and the Civil War," in William E. Brock (ed.), THE CIVIL WAR, (New York, 1969). Peterson argues that the political aspect of the American Dream disintegrated during the approximate period of the 1860s.

by most Americans until the twentieth century.²⁰

The American Dream is, then, a myth, a tradition, a doctrine,²¹ a guide, and perhaps even a dictator. In Robert T. Heilman's opinion, the Dream is a "streetwalker",²² and, because it means different things to different people, it has attained historical serviceability.²³ The Dream is the place for a new, good, ideal society. It is an environment coined from gold. It is an economic vision that has broadened into a cultural doctrine which, in turn, has served as cause and effect in most fields of American life. The Dream is an ambition, a national statement of intention. It is, finally, a democracy that invites every man to comfort and enhance his own status. Indeed, the Ideal contains all of these elements. In the main, however, they are cores of truth and, as such, are blurred

20. The democracy of American Democracy is, of course, a debatable issue. An astute assessment of this contentious point is made by Maxwell Geismar, "The Shifting Illusion: Dream and Fact," in David Madden (ed.), AMERICAN DREAMS, AMERICAN NIGHTMARES, (Carbondale, 1971), pp. 45-57. Convincingly, Madden argues that the theory of American Democracy has been its dream, the reality its nightmare.

21. This argument finds its extreme in Carl N. Degler, op.cit. Degler holds that the American Dream is a doctrine defining Americanism "and as such it is not merely a tradition. It is, therefore, what socialism is to a socialist." p. 271.

22. Robert B. Heilman, "The Dream Metaphor, Some Ramifications," in David Madden (ed.), op.cit., p. 4.

23. There is, nonetheless, an element of contrivance within the American Dream. This is qualified by its being a tradition that was more or less legislated into being, and, as such, is both concocted and circumscribed. For development of this argument see Marius Bewley, THE ECCENTRIC DESIGN: FORM IN THE CLASSIC AMERICAN NOVEL, (London, 1959).

by ambiguity and paradox. What, then is the common denominator of the American Dream? The answer is, in one word, possibility.

Indeed, the pervasive existence of possibility has been the cultural cornerstone of the American tradition firmly maintained during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁴ In the opinion of the eminent historian, Henry F. May, however, a new American civilization emerged during the period between 1912 and 1917.²⁵ Unlike his predecessors, the 'new' American was subject to the guilt, doubts and complexities absent in 'Eden'. By 1917, the 'Old Order' had all but disintegrated:

"the twenties hardly had to fight it. After the war it was hard to find a convincing or intellectually respectable spokesman for the prewar faith. The old moral idealism had become a caricature of Woodrow Wilson; the old culture an inaccurate memory of Howells." 26

Accordingly, the 1920s should not be seen through the perspective of a rural-urban division. Instead, the conflict should be assessed in terms of the cleavage between the American Dreamer and the Awakening American, that is, between those who insisted upon a return to the ill-defined

24. This claim is substantiated by the declaration that, until 1900, America could still be seen as "a Utopian land, or rather a land where Utopias became realities." Spiller et al, op.cit., p.215.

25. Henry F. May THE END OF AMERICAN INNOCENCE: A STUDY OF THE FIRST YEARS OF OUR OWN TIME, 1912-1917, (Chicago, 1964), p.364. May's argument is subject to the qualification that he is more concerned with releases than he is with generic developments.

26. Ibid. p.364

'Normalcy' of the prewar years, and those who accepted a rapidly diminishing, if not wholly diminished Dream.

The decade was still concerned with the Dream, however, because as Huggins warns, we must see the men of previous eras in their own terms, not ours; "In the 1920s the terms were based upon individual achievement, a share in the American Dream."²⁷ The Dream was still an accessible possibility, but decreasingly so. This perspective is shared by Van Wyck Brooks who says of the decade and the Dream,

"In 1920 there was still hope for an American Utopia, but doubt, mistrust, and anguish were becoming increasingly used terms in the American vocabulary. Indeed, by 1930, the 'lost' Gertrude Stein declared there was 'no future any more.'"

28

As such, the 1920s were "un-American."²⁹ and the relevance of the decade is that the American Everyman could no longer be defined as having Everything, or even the right to it.

Thus, when the decade opened, nationality, alone, was an inadequate qualification for the benefits of the Dream: the possibilities of citizenship were contracting at the very time they appeared to be at the peak of their expanse. Indeed, the postwar period forced upon Americans

27. Nathan Irvin Huggins, HARLEM RENAISSANCE, (New York, 1973), p.6.

28. Van Wyck Brooks, DAYS OF THE PHEONIX: THE NINETEEN TWENTIES I REMEMBER, (New York, 1957), p.184.

29. Wright Morris, THE TERRITORY AHEAD, (New York, 1963), p.13.

the realization that, for the majority, the past was gossamer, a fragile membrane that could neither withstand nor conceal the aridity of a present that must, nonetheless, be faced.

Accordingly, America was confronted by the paradox of subjecting its very meaning to an outspoken dialectic which, from the perspective of hindsight, was disappointingly preoccupied with asking questions and not with providing answers. There is, then, some degree of shrewdness in George Mowry's inference that the imperial reign of the American Dream was seriously debilitated during the 1920s because,

"From almost every angle the old-small-town-countryside Protestant culture was being viciously assaulted in the twenties. The census returns indicated that its numerical superiority was past. Its religious, ethical and moral values were being flouted at the same time its economic underpinning was collapsing, with disastrously falling farm prices. Small wonder then that the countryside and its like-minded allies in the cities responded to another crusade against its alleged enemies, a crusade growing out of frustration and impending defeat, and consequently one that could be easily perverted from the defense of its own disappearing values to the lynching of others."

30

Mowry is exact in identifying the 1920s as a crossroads. By stopping at this junction, however, the mileage that his conclusions are capable of gaining is lost. The importance for the 1920s, as well as the subsequent status of the American Dream, is that the decade represented or

30. George E. Mowry, THE URBAN NATION, 1920-1960, (New York, 1967), p. 31.

reflected the approach of modernity as defined by the continuation of the period's conflicts into the broader twentieth century: the issue of Bolshevism; the question of 'isolation' from the world order or involvement in it; the stand to be taken in regard to sex, marriage, and the family; the impact of new mass-media on the American consciousness; the revolutionary implications introduced by the automobile; the place of religion in an increasingly secular society; and most importantly, the sudden and dramatic confrontation between 'new-stock' Americans and 'old stock' Americans.³¹

Such were the topics the decade debated but never completely resolved. Indeed, by showing that the American Dream was no longer an invincible or even a necessarily appropriate guide, the basic legacy of the 1920s was the introduction of an uncertainty summed up in Langston Hughes' query,

"What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore-
and then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over
like a syrupy sweet?

31. I am indebted to Professor Arther Mann of the University of Chicago who suggested to me that the decade's relevance lay in its ability to posit questions but its inability to answer them. An extended evaluation of the issues involved follows in the section devoted to the mood and component parts of the 1920s.

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode? 32

THE MOOD OF THE 1920s.

The 1920s was a multifaceted era, and, at a time when, in Spiller's words, "nearly every mood and trend of thought was discoverable somewhere and at some time,"³³ Hughes' positioning of the American Dream serves to clarify the eclectic and contradictory tone of the period. Although it never disappeared entirely, the American Dream had become threadbare: desperation, it seemed, would become the decade's common and imperative denominator. Americans were faced with a senescent 'New World' and the vital need for new definitions of what was, in fact, American. The end result was a vacuum in which the present became a momentary fashion on the one hand, and, on the other a vague blur of uncertainty: never, in the history of the American civilization, had the future been so unpredictable. The American sense of direction was gone.

32. Cited in Elizabeth Heisch (ed.) DISCOVERY AND RECOLLECTION: AN ANTHOLOGY OF LITERARY TYPES, (New York, 1970), p.152. Hughes was a member of the so-called 'Harlem Renaissance.' Although significant, the 'Renaissance' is excluded because its very complexity would provide the subject of a thesis in itself. A reading guide to it is provided, however, in Appendix A of this thesis.

33. Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas J. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, and Richard M. Ludwig (eds.), LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES: HISTORY, (London, 1969), p.1254.

In this limited sense, therefore, the 1920s are definable as a period during which Americans discovered that God no longer sided with them. Those who lived during the decade were thus forced into the realization suggested by Frederick J. Hoffman, that "no world system is ever fixed or immune from moral revision,"³⁴ and because of this, there was need for "a redistribution of all the major metaphors of our lives, an attempt to give them new uses and new meanings."³⁵ In many senses, then, the 1920s appear as a springboard into modernity: stagnation, of any kind, seemed wholly un-American. It was "a time to plunge on all levels: that was the new American way."³⁶

The newness of the American way, the impetus to plunge into novelty and discord, were, in large part, derivatives of the period's economy. Attempts to pinpoint the actual state of the nation's wealth,³⁷ to find its causes, to go into the infirmity of its foundations, or to examine the unequal distribution of it, should all be

34. Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Temper of the Twenties," in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), THE TWENTIES: THE CRITICAL ISSUES, (Boston, 1972), p.117.

35. Hoffman, ibid, p.114. Hoffman's own text, THE TWENTIES: AMERICAN WRITING IN THE POSTWAR DECADE, (New York, 1966) is the best single assessment of the decade.

36. Paul Sann, THE LAWLESS DECADE: A PICTORIAL ESSAY OF THE GREAT AMERICAN TRANSITION: FROM THE WORLD WAR 1 ARMISTICE AND PROHIBITION TO REPEAL AND THE NEW DEAL, (New York, 1960), p.7.

37. This is best reviewed in William E. Leuchtenburg, THE PERILS OF PROSPERITY, 1914-1932, (Chicago, 1965). Supplementary reading can be found in Joseph Schumpeter, "The American Economy in the Interwar Period," AMERICAN ECONOMIC REVIEW, Volume XXXVI, No.2. (May, 1946), pp.1-10.

secondary to the broader declaration that the 1920s fostered a superficial impression of unprecedented richness. From that richness came a period of cultural doubt which manifested itself in the fight between the symbols of village America on the one hand, and Greenwich Village on the other. The end result was that the mood of the 1920s, that is, the very essence of the decade, was the sustained presence of lawlessness and conflict. "Normalcy".

One of the first, and certainly one of the most pervasive conflicts confronting American society during the 1920s, was adherence to or rebellion against the presence of 'Normalcy,' an inept description of the past. The word took its meaning from Warren G. Harding who stamped the decade with the label of 'Normalcy,'

"America's present need is not heroics,
but healing, not nostrums, but normalcy;
not revolution, but restoration ... not
surgery, but security." 38

In this sense, Harding aligned himself with traditional forces and if, as most critics hold, there was a marked degree of experimentation and innovation during the decade, it was the Chief Executive who, at this stage, was thought to have assumed the leadership of an opposing and conservative force. Speaking of these very traditional forces in an article entitled "Progress and Nostalgia: The Self Image of the 1920s," Lawrence W. Levine suggests that,

38. Cited in Paul Sann, op.cit., p.53.

"The ode to progress, no matter how elegantly composed, was not alone in the land; it was accompanied by a cry of longing for what had been." 39

Indeed, it was possible that man could live in the 'new world' at the same time that he cherished and maintained his dream of the 'old.' Past-oriented Americans hence balanced themselves between illusion and reality, or, to return the matter to Levine's vocabulary, they,

"continued to have gradiose hopes for the future but increasingly their dreams were moulded upon the patterns of the past." 40

In the President's hands, the solution was quite simple:

"If I [Harding] could plant a Rotary Club in every city and hamlet in the country I could then rest assured that our ideals of freedom would be safe and civilization would prosper." 41

Thus would the nation be restored to its 'normal' path.

One of the difficult problems is trying to decide what Harding and his allies meant by 'Normalcy.' Arthur Link provides a simplistic but not wholly unrealistic explanation in his argument that 'Normalcy' meant no more than a return to prosperity and peace.⁴² The failure of

39. Lawrence W. Levine, "Progress and Nostalgia: The Self Image of the Nineteen Twenties," in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (eds.), THE AMERICAN NOVEL AND THE NINETEEN TWENTIES, (London, 1971), p.38.

40. Ibid, p.42.

41. Walter E. Allen, THE URGENT WEST: THE AMERICAN DREAM AND MODERN MAN, (New York, 1969), p.198. For a more sympathetic perspective of Harding see Randolph C. Downes, "The Harding Muckfest - Chief Victim of the Muck-For-Muck's-Sake Writers and Readers," NORTHWEST OHIO QUARTERLY, Volume XXXIX, (Summer, 1967), pp.5-37.

42. Arthur S. Link, AMERICAN EPOCH: A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES SINCE THE 1890s, VOLUME 1. 1897-1920, (New York, 1917), p.231.

this particular premise is, however, that prosperity was not a constant of the decade, and peace abroad was followed by a period of strife at home. Bypassing these defects in an article chronicling the decade's intolerance, Paul Murphy maintains that 'Normalcy' was no more than a clumsy brand name for the sanctions of a national consensus of past-oriented Americans,⁴³ and, if it were not for his failure to fully identify this group, Murphy's conclusion would be persuasive. The search for an accurate definition is extended in D.K.Adams' substantial attempt to restrict the meaning of 'Normalcy' to the limited context of a description of government policy,⁴⁴ that is,

"The essential paradox of a peace loving people in a 'foreign' war for the preservation of democracy in Europe was echoed in the domestic sphere by profound contradictions between ideals and reality, between expressed hopes and necessary actions which confused contemporary Americans. The fruit of these conclusions was 'normalcy.' As a descriptive word it

43. Paul L.Murphy, "Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s," THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY, Volume LI, No.1, (June, 1964), p.61.

44. This is countered by the argument that, unlike the politics of the period preceding the World War, the 1920s constituted a period of widespread political activity, and that this was not the normal case. For further treatment of this argument see James Weinstein, "Radicalism in the Midst of Normalcy," JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY, Volume XXII, No.4, (March, 1966), pp.773-790. As for Republican policy, it is held that, by adhering to 'Normalcy,' the Party lost the Negro vote. For further reference see Richard B.Sherman, "Republicans and Negroes: The Lessons of Normalcy," PHYLON, Volume XXVII, No.1, (Spring. 1966), pp.63-79.

was completely inappropriate for the society which it enveloped, but it aptly symbolizes the intentions of government policy." 45

Adams' thesis is relevant because it defines 'Normalcy' in terms of a limited frame of reference on the one hand, and, on the other, legitimately pinpoints the term's descriptive inadequacies.

Link, Murphy and Adams deserve credit for the cases they advance. However, none of the three go far enough: they fail to concede that, in terms of a real return to America of prewar days, the state that they are evaluating simply did not exist. This argument is supported in THE SHAPING OF TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA: INTERPRETIVE ARTICLES, where Abrams and Levine claim that,

"An era that featured or produced cubism, Coué, Capone, the Klan, the Charleston, the chemise, the speakeasies, tommy-guns, and the Teapot Dome - as well as the only paternity case ever to have emerged from the White House - hardly deserves the designation 'Normalcy' which the hapless Warren Harding bestowed upon it." 46

Indeed, the decade saw conflict after conflict, and the developing momentum of the Twenties bore scant resemblance to the more pedestrian America of prewar days. Or, to take the argument one step further, what did exist, as the norm of 'Normalcy,' was conflict.⁴⁷

45. D.K. Adams, AMERICA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: A STUDY OF THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1917, (Cambridge, 1967) p.33

46. Richard Abrams and Lawrence Levine (eds.), THE SHAPING OF TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA: INTERPRETIVE ARTICLES, (Boston, 1965), p.345.

47. For further development of this argument see Eric Mottram, "The Hostile Environment and the Survival Artist: A Note on the 1920s," in Bradbury and Palmer, op.cit., pp.233-262.

The conflicts that did arise were the outgrowth of an inability to recapture the essence of prewar days, and the refusal of traditionally-minded Americans to accept this as an irreversible phenomenon. America had, however, changed. Americans returning from the war in Europe found the America of 1919 very different from the America of 1917.⁴⁸ Wartime prosperity had dried up and was replaced by unemployment, depression, and overexpansion. Men and women were working longer hours for less pay as inflation reduced the purchasing power of the dollar. Picketing was associated with Bolshevism. There were race riots, and the activities of the Ku Klux Klan had been revived. Women, who had raised their hemlines and bobbed their hair, looked and acted differently. Wilson's peace without victory was being thwarted by a victor's peace with Germany on its knees, and efforts to promote the League of Nations proved fruitless. By 1920, Prohibition had been ushered in amidst maudlin scenes lamenting the exit of a wet, happy world, and, in the opposite corner, an air of rejoicing to celebrate the beginning of a period marked by clear thinking and clean living. The Red Raids and the Palmer Raids represented strict constitutional infringements, and drew their dubious legality from The Espionage Act (1917) and The Sedition Act (1919). Westinghouse Electric had made its first radio

48. This argument is shown at its best in John Dos Passos, THREE SOLDIERS, (New York, 1921).

broadcast, the Motion-Picture industry had got off the ground, and the automobile industry was growing apace with changing times: Main Street was giving way to Masscult.

There is, therefore, a great deal of evidence to substantiate two claims that John McCormick advances in his comparative history of American fiction during the 1920s. Firstly, and correctly, McCormick argues that "American society was in a period of rapid transition immediately after World War 1,"⁴⁹ and secondly, that prior to 1929, "The time of order was surely over, but the time of disorder was still on its way."⁵⁰ It can be argued, therefore, that in the backwards journey to a bygone 'Normalcy,' the generation of the 1920s did become, as Gertrude Stein declared it had, lost:⁵¹ that is, by settling for a new sensibility, a significant number of Americans jettisoned their faith in the prewar past and launched themselves on a sea of uncertainty. The quest for 'Normalcy' and opposition to it was a major conflict of the 1920s, and sparked off one of the most

49. John McCormick, AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1919-1932, A COMPARATIVE HISTORY, (London, 1971), p.215.

50. Ibid, p.215.

51. Stein's contention that the generation of the Twenties was 'lost' is cited by Loren Baritz, "The Culture of the Twenties," in Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner (eds.), THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMERICAN CULTURE, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970), p.151. For further reference to 'Normalcy,' see Joan Hoff Wilson's excellent introductory essay, "How Normal Was Normalcy?" in Joan Hoff Wilson, op.cit., pp.vii-xxv.

virulent periods of intolerance the United States has known.⁵²

Intolerance.

In "Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s," Paul Murphy argues that intolerance was a toxic and integral part of the 1920s, "participated in, consciously or unconsciously, by the great majority of Americans."⁵³ Indeed, the knights of 'Normalcy' readily became the champions of the closed mind, and intolerance became one of the main weapons in their arsenal of defense. In this sense, Morrell Heald suggests that the disturbed nature of the period was one of the principal causes of the outbreak of intolerance. The 1920s, he says, were,

"a troubled decade in which old and new were inextricably intermingled and confronted. It was a time for deep uncertainty and conflict: of faltering attempts to face - or sometimes to avoid the fact of change."⁵⁴

Heald's argument is shared by Stanley Coben who, in assessing the period's nativism, holds that there is always an American climate for intolerance, but that postwar nativism was ferocious and unplanned. It was, he claims, "brought on largely by a series of severe

52. This claim is disputed by Professor Hoffman in his contention that tolerance was a characteristic of the 1920s, which were receptive to all forms of protest, rebellion, satire and experiment. See Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Temper of the Twenties," in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), op.cit., pp.109-118.

53. Paul Murphy, op.cit., p.61.

54. Morrell Heald, "Business Thought in the Twenties: Social Responsibility," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume XIII, No.2, part 1, (Summer, 1961), p.126.

social and economic dislocations which threatened the national equilibrium."⁵⁵ It seems, then, that the primary intention of traditional forces was the desire to arrest the disintegration of their culture.⁵⁶

Intolerance was the struggle for survival between the old and the new modes of life. Manifestations of intolerance indicated that formerly insulated values were now subject to the lure of new behavioural patterns suggested by automobiles, radios, movies, romance magazines, and national service clubs. Faced with the pressure to standardise, isolated groups were now subjected to a challenge to modify the intensity with which they insisted that regular practice was the best routine.

This challenge was not levelled at the system, but at the deviator from it. Of two kinds, the ranks of the first group of 'deviants' included those whose structure of values and methods of attaining them were at variance with the mores of the day. Radicals, militant labour leaders and other 'unreasonable' critics of the system had to be kept in their place, and firmly. The second and more numerous group of dissenters were those who

55. Stanley Coben, "A Study in Nativism: The American Red Scare of 1919-1920," POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY, Volume LXXIX, No.1, (March, 1964), p.59.

56. See Paul Murphy, "Normalcy, Intolerance, and the American Character," VIRGINIA QUARTERLY REVIEW, Volume XL, (Summer, 1964), pp.445-459. Murphy argues that the degree of intolerance varied during the 1920s, but the period witnessed "... the most disgraceful and wholesale departures from fundamental guarantees of basic liberty and due process of law in American history." p.449

sought, 'unjustifiably,' to reach the full attainment of the success symbols which the system held out. They became the targets of Klan antipathy towards the ambitious immigrant, non Anglo-Saxon, non Protestant, whose drive to overachieve resulted in his being kept in his place. One example might be the Jew who sought membership in the local country club; another, the Catholic wanting to become President.

The crumbling of standard conventions was typified by the many expressions of dissatisfaction and disaffection as more radical groups, within labour for example, demonstrated that they were no longer willing to accept the conditions or possibilities for promotion under the status quo.⁵⁷ Businessmen, who feared an alliance between dissident malcontents and more orthodox labour, looked at the postwar strikes with growing alarm. The interest some Americans were showing in the economic and political implications of Bolshevism further inflamed the issue.⁵⁸ In the determination to uphold old ways as the only suitable ones, fear was translated into

57. An interesting example of this determination can be found in Nelson Van Valen, "The Bolsheviki and the Orange Growers," PACIFIC HISTORICAL REVIEW, Volume XXII, (February, 1953), pp.39-50. The International Workers of the World were subjected to intense derision for their part in the strike, which was seen as part of an international plot to spread Bolshevism.

58. See Edwin Layton, "The Better American Federation: A Study in Superpatriotism," PACIFIC HISTORICAL REVIEW, Volume XXX (May, 1961), pp.137-147.

irrationality, and the Red Scares were followed by the Palmer Raids. The Red Scares were more or less played out in the early days of the decade, but their inheritance continued into the latter years of the period when the two 'radicals,' Sacco and Vanzetti, were executed, purportedly for their radicalism, and not for the crime of murder on which they stood indicted.⁵⁹

The climate of the 1920s was hostile towards foreigners, foreign ideas, and, if Spiller and his associates are to be believed, towards ideas per se.⁶⁰ The overall mood of the decade, then, was not unfriendly towards the activities of the Ku Klux Klan which acted as a purveyor of intolerance. A conservative force, the Klan was a defender rather than a critic of the American 'way of life.' Indeed, the Klan's determination to uphold established ways was such that non-Wasps were judged not merely to be inferior Americans, but to be incapable even of being Americans.⁶¹ Chalmers adds,

"In the 1920s the Klan was a powerful force which marched, elected, and sometimes terrorized, literally from Maine to California. What was it like in the United States when one out of

59. See James Grossman, "The Sacco Vanzetti Case Reconsidered," COMMENTARY, Volume XXXIII, No.1. (January, 1962), pp.31-44.

60. Spiller et al, op.cit., p.1116.

61. David Chalmers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Politics in the 1920s," MISSISSIPPI QUARTERLY, Volume XVIII, (Fall, 1965), p.242.

every thirty Americans was a member of a hooded, violence-oriented organization which preached the rejection of all but white, protestant, native-born Americans." 62

The Klan functioned, therefore, as a traditional force in the preservation of pioneer hopes⁶³ by limiting patriotism and spiritual independence to the select membership of the Nordic stock. In emphasizing traditional moral and ethical codes, in insisting that America had wandered from the paths and conventions of its past fame, in the dire warnings against the continuing dilution of the standard stock, in the hostility towards urban mores and values, and in the opposition towards the modernist forces within the church, the Klan stood against, as Walter Lippmann so graphically stated it, the "acids of modernity."⁶⁴

Although nativism never disappeared entirely during the 1920s, support for the Klan declined even before the successful passage of The National Origins Act (1929) which imposed severe restrictions on immigration. A mood of optimism associated with the perceived prosperity of the decade began to develop, and this ran counter to the Klan's pessimistic spirit. In the final assessment, then, nativism solved few problems during the period, and

62. Ibid, pp.234-235. Despite traditional perspectives, Klan activities were by no means confined to rural areas. For further reference see Kenneth T.Jackson's highly rated THE KU KLUX KLAN IN THE CITY, 1915-1930, (New York, 1970).

63. The degree to which the pioneer past was being abandoned during the 1920s is well presented in Mark Van Doren, "The Repudiation of the Pioneer," COLLEGE ENGLISH, Volume XVII, (October, 1928), pp.616-623.

64. Cited in Hiram Wesley Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," in Abrams and Levine, op.cit., p.883.

this conclusion is shared by Stanley Coben who argues that the issues of a damaged value system, an unrestrained business cycle, hostility towards Russia, and fear of Communism, were all left for other generations of Americans to resolve.⁶⁵

Prohibition.

It was the generation of the 1920s, however, who were left to decide the fate of Prohibition. Backed by the Eighteenth Amendment and The Volstead Act (1919), the 1920s had opened with an attack launched by traditional America in the form of Prohibition, and whether or not the old culture was potent enough to impose its 'experiment' on the new one was a crucial issue of the decade. Representing a desire to keep America as it was, the movement for Temperance was most directly associated with rural America and constituted, in Loren Baritz' words, "a measure passed by village America against urban America."⁶⁶ From the beginning, however, the widespread disregard of Prohibition provided the decade's most classic example of the negation of institutionalism by behaviourism.

In many senses, then, the 1920s was a lawless decade, not merely because of the overly emphasized alliteration of alcohol and Al Capone,⁶⁷ but because

65. Coben, op.cit., p.75.

66. Baritz, in Coben and Ratner, op.cit., p.157. See also Leuchtenburg, op.cit., pp.204-224. Andrew Sinclair's PROHIBITION: THE ERA OF EXCESS, (Boston, 1962) is a standard account of the reactionary rather than the solely conservative nature of Prohibition.

67. Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., pp.204-224.

Prohibition, which had a great impact on America, evoked minimal obedience from Americans. The decade was lawless because it discarded shackles. Prohibition, which violated the American's right to pamper himself, was rejected. City dwellers, in particular, were disinclined to abide by any laws that sanctified the hatreds or the prejudices of a cultural group whose powers were in decline, and their contempt for and circumvention of the law was soon matched in some of the smaller towns and parts of the countryside.

Indeed, the evasion of Prohibition stamped the 1920s with a large part of its peculiar pace and colour. The younger generation led the way, and, as Nelson Manfred Blake suggest in his weighty literary history of the times, they were soon to be accompanied by a willing band of followers:

"By 1923, their elders, tired of watching the carnival with ill-concealed envy, had discovered that young liquor will take the place of young blood, and with a whoop the orgy began." 68

Although Blake overstates his case, he does capture the spirit of the time. The traditionalists who proposed the Amendment and the Act had hoped for an era of peace, prosperity, and propriety. This expectation crumbled, however, not only in the evasion of the law, but also in

68. Nelson Manfred Blake, NOVELISTS' AMERICA: FICTION AS HISTORY: 1910-1940, (New York, 1969), p.74

the face of gangsterism and its various manifestations: the twin symbols of the Amendment became, suggestively, the Tommy-gun and the Poisoned Cup. In the 1920s, because it was a forbidden fruit, whisky had assumed a new taste. Resultingly, as the usually acerbic H.L. Mencken noted, evading Prohibition "ceased to wear any aspects of crime, and became a sort of national sport."⁶⁹ And Polly Adler, the celebrated New York madam, observed of efforts to enforce Prohibition, that "they might as well have been trying to dry up the Atlantic with a post-office blotter."⁷⁰ The government, it seemed, sought the blood of the men who made and smuggled whiskey, not those who drank it.⁷¹

The results of Prohibition are difficult to estimate. The Drys attributed to the Eighteenth Amendment and The Volstead Act the saving of the nation's health, and credited them with decreases in prostitution, profanity, attacks on chastity, and similar corruptions endemic in the stupor of city life. Americans, they claimed, were drinking milk as never before. The Wets saw Prohibition as the sickest headache and the longest hangover in history. Each side had separate facts, and a separate

69. Sann, op.cit., p.90.

70. Ibid.

71. The ability of the government to police Prohibition is a neglected aspect of 1920s historiography. Could the government do much? The Canadian Border and the Atlantic Coast were too big to police effectively, but this was a minor problem when compared to the number of home alky cookers and the moonshiners flourishing in unlikely places such as an abandoned church in Iowa with a fifty thousand dollar rig in its sub cellar.

set of experts to support them. To further complicate the issue, journalists of the time, particularly those writing from the cities, stamped Prohibition with the seal of fiasco.

Prohibition was not, however, a total failure. Indeed, as John C. Burnham points out in his influential "New Perspectives of the Prohibition 'Experiment' in the 1920s," Prohibition should correctly be seen as a reform, and not as an experiment.⁷² In this perspective, and because the primary intention of Temperance advocates was to restrict outlets rather than to banish alcohol altogether, Prohibition should be regarded as a "success."⁷³ Burnham's argument, in some instances, is extreme,⁷⁴ but it legitimately fosters an awareness of the difficulties involved in generalizing the Prohibition issue,⁷⁵ and points out that consumption rates not only declined,⁷⁶

72. John C. Burnham, "New Perspectives on the Prohibition 'Experiment' in the 1920s," THE JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY, Volume VII, No.1, (Fall, 1968), p.68.

73. Ibid, p.52.

74. He argues, for example, that repeal of Prohibition under the Twenty-First Amendment (1933) resulted largely from the Depression. Restoration of liquor control to the states would provide revenue in the form of taxes, and Prohibition was used as a scapegoat for causing the Depression. The latter claim, in particular, is excessive. See Burnham, op.cit., pp.67-68.

75. Conditions varied enormously. Chicago and New York, popular scenes for setting the Prohibition drama, were not representative of the nation as a whole. For further development see Burnham, op.cit. p.58.

76. This point is also made in Leuchtenburg, op.cit., p.214, and by Levine in Bradbury and Palmer, op.cit., pp.42-50.

but drinking patterns changed as well. Commonly overlooked, this last factor is of the utmost importance. Prior to the 1920s, the working classes were the main patrons of the saloons, the presence of upper class men drinking in public was uncommon, and openly public consumption of liquor by upper class women was almost without precedent. During the 1920s, however, as liquor became a luxury, a status-associated commodity, the patronage of speakeasies and public consumption of alcohol by both male and female members of society's upper echelons became more commonplace. Simultaneously, there was a considerable reduction in working class consumption of liquor, and this had been one of the primary aims of the Prohibitionists.⁷⁷

"Ballyhoo"

A more startling and far reaching display of changing patterns of social behaviour during the 1920s was exemplified in the widespread addiction by Americans during the period to the fads and fashions of the moment. Designating this phenomenon as "Ballyhoo",⁷⁸ Frederick Lewis Allen states that one of the most distinctive features of the 1920s was,

"the unparalleled rapidity and unanimity with which millions of men and women turned their attention, their talk, and their emotional interest upon a series of tremendous trifles - a heavyweight boxing-match, a murder trial, a new automobile model, a transatlantic flight." 79

77. This claim is substantiated in Burnham, op.cit., p.64.

78. Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., pp.155-187.

79. Ibid, p.155.

Allen is clearly wrong in dismissing the advent of the automobile and the flight across the Atlantic as 'trifles,' but his point that the generation of the 1920s passionately immersed their energies, interest and loyalties in a series of dubiously important events and the personalities associated with them cannot be safely ignored. What remains significant, however, and this point eludes Allen, is that the people and the actions in question were held to be noteworthy within the decade, and it is from this perspective that they should be evaluated.

The crucial issue is, therefore, the explanation behind the popularity of such diverse variants, to name but a few, as Cubism, Mah Jong, Crossword Puzzles, the Charleston and the Tango; the thirst for every detail of the Leopold-Loeb murder, the sex spectaculars of the Snyder-Gray and Hall-Mills trials, and the indictment of Roscoe Arbuckle; the adulation afforded Red Grange, the football star, and the mass following of the Dempsey-Tunney fights where boxing was made respectable and lucrative; the worship given the indefinable sex appeal of Clara Bow, and the flood of mass emotion that accompanied the funeral, in 1926, of Rudolph Valentino; and finally, of greater significance, the Scopes Trial at Dayton and Lindbergh's celebrated flight from New York to Paris. The last two examples, and there are many more, help to interpret the issue at hand. Both involved the substitution of new gods for old ones, and the widespread public attention received by both was made possible by the centralization and extension of mass communications.

F. Scott Fitzgerald observed that the younger generation, the men and women of the postwar years, had "grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in men shaken."⁸⁰ Although this declaration is too broad, Fitzgerald did voice the loss of conviction shared by many Americans caught between the aftermath of the war and the forefront of an accelerating, frequently bewildering passage into twentieth century modernity. There was a vacuum, and it needed to be filled. By taking ordinary events or people and transforming them into extraordinary forces, the generation of the 1920s provided themselves with an alternative system that, in the main, could be discarded whenever they wished.⁸¹ The critically important element was that new ways at least appeared to be as accessible as they were immediate, and it was reassuring that the idols of the times, like other Americans, were prone to the human factor. In addition, news and ideas became mass produced as channels of mass communication were extended. Indeed, paying homage to the new powers of the media, Frederick Lewis Allen noted that,

"The national mind had become as never before an instrument upon which a few men could play."⁸²

80. Cited by Douglas C. Stenerson, H.L. MENCKEN: ICONOCLAST FROM BALTIMORE, (Chicago, 1971), p.209.

81. Substantiation and extension of this point can be found in Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., pp.158-160.

82. Ibid, p.157.

Ownership of newspapers had been centralized during the period, and syndication, with its hub in New York City, streamlined the journalistic output of the day. The Press, aided by the new and popular national magazines,⁸³ was a powerful agent behind the standardization of the American mind. Another popular and innovative feature of the decade, radio broadcasting, offered something for everyone in its programmes of sport, politics, music and opinions, and it was an equally important vehicle for disseminating the cultural phenomena of the period.⁸⁴ Indeed, there is soundness in the argument that the Scopes Trial and Lindbergh's historic flight had their significance profoundly increased by the media's ability to allow the nation full participation in the events almost at the very time that they occurred.

The trial of Thomas Scopes for the teaching of Darwinian theories of evolution was a climax to the Fundamentalist controversy,⁸⁵ the principal internal conflict in American Protestantism during the 1920s. The protagonists were the liberals or 'Modernists' who sought

83. Examples of articles written for the national magazines are best displayed in Brendan Gill's revised and enlarged edition of THE PORTABLE DOROTHY PARKER, (New York, 1973).

84. The rise of the mass mind is discriminatingly chronicled in George Mowry, op.cit.,

85. The standard account of the controversy is N.F.Furniss THE FUNDAMENTALIST CONTROVERSY, 1918-1931, (New Haven, 1954). The best single work is, however, the more recent text by W.B.Gatewood, CONTROVERSY IN THE TWENTIES: FUNDAMENTALISM, MODERNISM, AND EVOLUTION, (Nashville, 1969).

to adjust the inherited faith to the new intellectual climate, and the 'Fundamentalists' who insisted that old ways of stating the faith must be preserved unimpaired. Thus it was part of the wider cultural conflict of the 1920s. In particular, Fundamentalist sentiment, wholly one hundred-percent American, was not unrelated to the wave of hyperpatriotism that was a conspicuous feature of the decade. Although other factors account for the widespread public attention given to the controversy,⁸⁶ the fact that the national comedy acted out at Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, was good copy for the newspapers, helped to account for the national preoccupation with the trial and the star status of the opposing attorneys, William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow. In the cultural rather than the theological context, the debate questioned whether or not old gods were, in fact, dead, and whether or not new divinities could withstand the scrutiny of public attention. Although Scopes lost the case, the obscurantism, violent language and smear tactics of the more vociferous Fundamentalists resulted in a moral and popular victory for the Modernists. The

86. See, for example, R.T.Handy, "Fundamentalism and Modernism in Perspective," RELIGION IN LIFE, Volume XXIV, (1955), pp.381-94; E.R.Sandeen, "Towards an Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," CHURCH HISTORY, Volume XXXVI, (1967); E.R.Sandeen, "The Fundamentals: The last Flowering of the Millinarian-Conservative Alliance," JOURNAL OF PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY, Volume XLVI, (1969), pp.55-73; and W.J.McLoughlin Jr., BILLY SUNDAY WAS HIS REAL NAME, (Chicago, 1955).

important factors are that a local event gained national prominence, and, in its coverage of the trial, an active media permitted an attentive public to arrive at its own conclusions.

The media was also at hand when, in May of 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh flew from Washington D.C. to Paris, solo, non-stop, winning a \$25,000 prize.⁸⁷ His reception in Paris was tumultuous, but modest compared to those awaiting him at home.⁸⁸ After seven years of crime, scandal, and Prohibition, the American public was ready for a genuine, all-American hero.⁸⁹ The flight brought to the surface of public opinion the need for regeneration, and Lindbergh reflected to Americans a gratifying image of themselves at a time when they had need of such a vision. Indeed, as Paul Sann states with his customary ebullience, America "was ready for a collective love affair with someone nice, like a clean living boy from the Midwest who wouldn't know a hip flask from a nightclub doll."⁹⁰ This point is also made by Russell

87. Frederick Lewis Allen suggests that, in the final assessment, Lindbergh was a "stunt flyer" motivated by money. See F.L.Allen, op.cit., pp.155-156.

88. See Edwin L.James et al, "Lindbergh's Reception in France, Belgium, England, Washington D.C., New York and St. Louis," CURRENT HISTORY, Volume XXVI, No.4, (July, 1927), pp.522-538.

89. With its tradition of ingenuity and free enterprise, America was also prepared to entertain thoughts of the commercial prospects in air travel. For substantiation and development of this point see Edward Marshall, "The Practicality of Transocean Air Service," CURRENT HISTORY, Volume XXVI, No.4. (July, 1927), pp.639-642.

90. Sann, op.cit., p.162.

Owen when, in "Lindbergh's Epoch Making Flight from New York to Paris," he suggests that the great aviator's flight was the greatest individual triumph in American history, and Lindbergh himself,

"stands out in a grubby world as an inspiration of what idealistic youth can be. And it is because he so typifies the spirit of clean knighthood that men have honoured him greatly." 91

Lindbergh had risen from comparative obscurity to become the hero of the decade, much loved, and much publicized.⁹² The flight, however, transcended personal attainment. In an age dominated by conflict, the transatlantic crossing functioned as a dual metaphor to express the achievement of an heroic, solitary, unaided individual on the one hand, and, on the other, the triumph of the machine and the success of an industrially organized society. A significant number of Americans read into the flight a celebration of self-sufficiency in which Lindbergh became a pioneer linked to the tradition of individualism in the American experience. The Atlantic had become the new 'frontier,' and the machine that made Lindbergh's flight possible symbolized the advance into a complex industrial present.

91. Russell Owen, "Lindbergh's Epoch Making Flight From New York to Paris," CURRENT HISTORY, Volume XXVI, No.4. (July, 1927), p.506.

92. The role played by the media in elevating Lindbergh to national prominence is outlined in James et al, op.cit., and in Marshall, op.cit.

Traditional America celebrated differently. It also took the terms 'pioneer' and 'frontier', but injected into them the idea that America's glory lay somewhere in the past, and that America should look backwards in time to discover some lost virtue. Regression into a frontier past collided with progression into an industrial future. Ultimately, however, Lindbergh's flight was future-orienting; no matter how reluctant traditionalists might be to make the admission, The Spirit of St. Louis showed history as meaning progress rather than decline.

Manners and Morals

In the realm of manners and morals, however, the situation seems, initially at least, to have been reversed. History was read to mean decline, and not progress. 'Normalcy,' Intolerance, Prohibition, and 'Ballyhoo' had all made their separate contributions towards the decline: in turn, they interacted mutually to influence a startling change in social standards and the ways of expressing them, and culminated in a full scale mutiny against what had hitherto been accepted as the everyday decency of the traditional American order. Both stunned and excited by this kind of apostasy, Frederick Lewis Allen blamed the younger generation with one half of his heart, and envied them with the other. Observing that the conventional moral code of the nation was imperiled, he declared,

"The shock troops of the rebellion were not alien agitators, but the sons and daughters of well-to-do American families, who knew little about Bolshevism and cared distinctly less, and their defiance was not expressed in obscure radical

publications or in soap box speeches, but right across the family breakfast table into the horrified ears of conservative mothers and fathers." 93

Allen's contention conforms to the critical commonplace that youth constituted an integral part of the decade. These convictions are overstated and misleading. While young people were acting with more freedom than before, so were other age groups. What was essential to the decade was not simply youth, but the widespread struggle to adapt to the requirements and life-styles of modernity. Conditions were sufficiently different from those of preceding decades that many Americans had no set of experiences with which to define their position in society. In many respects the conflict of the 1920s was brought about by immaturity. Adulthood was not necessarily an outgrowth of the decade, and this has been revealed in contemporary history and literature. The American, seemingly mature, was still struggling against the pressures towards conformity imposed by scientific, technological, economic and societal innovations.⁹⁴

From this perspective the 1920s are important because the order of laws had been sundered by events prior to and

93. Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., p.73.

94. Development and substantiation of this claim can be found in W.Tasker Witham, THE ADOLESCENT IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL, 1920-1960, (New York, 1964).

during the decade, and this accounted for changing patterns of behaviour. During the First World War, for example, Americans engaged in the field of duty and on the home front had been subject to violent disruptions, and the war generation had grown accustomed to living, almost without rules, for the day.⁹⁵ At war's end, returning soldiers were blamed for importing into America the moral and sexual laxity of Continental countries,⁹⁶ and although this conviction has been legitimately revised,⁹⁷ it nonetheless may have influenced the thoughts and the activities of a misinformed public. In addition, the conclusion of the war and the defeat of Wilson's ideals for peace brought with them a widespread sense of disillusionment, and the discrepancy between ideal and real was personified by an article published in THE SMART SET where the editors, George Jean Nathan and H.L. Mencken, declared that,

"Both of us are opposed to all such ideas as come from the mob, and are polluted by its stupidity: Puritanism, Prohibition, Comstockery, evangelical Christianity, tin-pot patriotism, the whole sham of democracy. Both of us, though against Socialism and in favour of Capitalism, believe that Capitalism in the United States is ignorant, disreputable, and degraded, and that its heroes are bounders." 98

95. See Gilman M. Ostrander, "The Revolution in Morals," in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), op.cit., p.133.

96. See Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., p.78.

97. See Fred D. Baldwin, "The Invisible Armor: Sexual Morality in World War I," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume XVI, No.3, (Fall, 1964), pp 432-444. Baldwin argues that the American government went to great pains to ensure that the wounds suffered in action were inflicted on the battlefields, and not in the brothels of Europe.

98. Cited from "A Personal Word," in Stenerson, op.cit., p.5.

The previous generations had willed to their offsprings in the 1920s a legacy that the world was shabby, and that its position was debilitated and precarious.⁹⁹

In an effort to restore both meaning and order to life, therefore, the American 1920s turned to the one force that had emerged from the war practically unblemished, science: in the popular context this would be used both to explain and condone the behavioural 'departures' of the decade. The theories of Sigmund Freud, albeit inaccurately and even wildly interpreted, naturally drew warm responses from a generation whose social props had fallen down and who were, it seemed, preoccupied with individual fulfillment. Indeed, in a study of Freud's influence in the United States during the 1920s, Jewell W. Vincent holds that,

"One point of agreement is that the decade of the 1920s was revolutionary in morals

99. The implications of this legacy were far reaching. In the field of religion, for example, postwar disillusionment resulted in a religious 'depression.' Because the decline was gradual, however, 'depression' may be too strong a term. Nonetheless, Protestantism, in particular, lost its prime position, and, by the end of the decade, was reduced to partnership status in the triumvirate of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. For further reference see R.T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," CHURCH HISTORY, Volume XXIX, No.1, (March, 1960), pp.3-16; John Lankford, "The Impact of the Religious Depression on Protestant Benevolence, 1925-1935," JOURNAL OF PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY, (June, 1964), pp.104-123; and William T. Doherty, "The Impact of Businessmen on Protestantism, 1900-1929," BUSINESS HISTORY REVIEW, Volume XXVIII, (June, 1954), pp.141-153.

and manners and it was then that Freud was popularised in this country." 100

It is significant, therefore, that,

"to those who have no other belief,
Freudianism sometimes serves as a
philosophy of life." 101

America in revolt was ready for Freud and Freud ready for it. Thus, as has been outlined by Grace Adams, the rise of psychology was confused in the public mind with the science of electrical appliances and motor vehicles.¹⁰² It was not surprising, therefore, that Americans took from Freudianism the notion that sex motivated mankind, or, as

100. Jewell W. Vincent, "Some Influences of Sigmund Freud on the 1920s in the United States," SOUTHERN QUARTERLY, Volume XI, (January, 1964), pp.138-149. A divergent opinion is expressed in Geoffrey H. Steere, "Freudianism and Child Rearing in the Twenties," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume XX, No.4, (Winter, 1968), pp.759-767. Steere argues that, if Freudianism had been so widespread in the 1920s, it would be expected to have been apparent in child rearing practices, but it was not. In Lucille C. Birnbaum, "Behaviourism in the 1920s," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume VII, No.1. (Spring, 1955), pp.15-30, the authoress assesses the impact of Watsonian Behaviourism which was at variance with Freudian theory. One of Freud's most hostile critics, John B. Watson, is credited with the statement that "The scientific level of Freud's concept of the unconscious is exactly on par with the miracle of Jesus," p.18. The literary implications of Freudianism are displayed at their best in Frederick J. Hoffman, FREUDIANISM AND THE LITERARY MIND, (Baton Rouge, 1957).

101. Alfred Kazin, noted authority on the period, cited in Steere, op.cit., p.759.

102. Grace Adams, "The Rise and Fall of Psychology," THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, Volume CLIII, No.1, (January, 1934), pp.82-83.

F.L.Allen puts it, "The first requirement of mental health was to have an uninhibited sex life."¹⁰³ This may have helped to influence or even account for the 'new' morality of the postwar period, but only in the context of the times when fervor for Freud reached fever pitch. From the perspective of hindsight, therefore, Jewell Vincent argues that the psychologist from Vienna acquired an unjust reputation for causing the decline in moral standards during the decade, yet "Freud cannot be said even to have attacked sexual morality."¹⁰⁴ Freud's impact on the 1920s has been consistently overstated, and his influence upon behavioural patterns during the decade should be subject to detailed revision.

Such revision could very well reveal that the factors determining behavioural changes during the 1920s were more wholly American. In ONLY YESTERDAY: AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF THE 1920s, for example, Allen cites American agents - Prohibition, the automobile, popular magazines, motion pictures - which might have been even more influential than he understood them to be. Prohibition, attended by evasion, mixed drinking and gangsterism, brought about obvious changes. The automobile was equally if not more potent an agent in shifting social patterns. By increasing mobility, the motor car allowed men and women more freedom

103. Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., p.82.

104. Vincent, op.cit., p.144.

than before and, as one juvenile court judge put it, had become a "house of prostitution on wheels."¹⁰⁵ If all Americans could not afford the luxury of Model A Fords, the magazine and motion picture industries provided inexpensive and lurid alternatives which fully confronted an even wider public with the potency of the libido, even if the word itself was never mentioned, or even understood.¹⁰⁶

It seems that nothing was sacred. Women, traditionally cherished as champions of national morality and paragons of American innocence, changed their appearance, their status, and their patterns of behaviour during the 1920s.¹⁰⁷ The new fashion was to be unshockable, and, at the same time, to be shocking. Hemlines rose and necklines plunged as the berouged Flapper, lips painted and hair cropped, turned a deaf ear to pleas for modesty from fashion writers and legislators.¹⁰⁸ Enfranchised by the Nineteenth

105. Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., p.83, citing the Lynds in MIDDLETOWN.

106. Frederick Lewis Allen, ibid, holds that publishers "learned to a nicety the gentle art of arousing the reader without arousing the censor," p.83, and that the motion picture industry gave "lip service to the old code" but "diligently and with consummate vulgarity publicised the new." p.85. Censorship was never entirely dormant, however, and verification of this point can be found in Paul S. Boyer, "Boston Book Censorship in the Twenties," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume XV, No.1, (Spring, 1963) pp. 3-24.

107. This change was not altogether sudden and had its antecedents in previous decades. In "The American Woman's pre-World War 1 Freedom in Morals and Manners," JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY, Volume LV, for example, James R. McGovern claims that the revolution in morals and manners took place in the period 1910-1920, and not in the period 1920-1930.

108. Ostrander, in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.) op.cit., p.133.

Amendment (1920), women of the decade grew increasingly independent as technological innovations, exemplified by the growing use of home appliances, reduced the time and effort devoted to housekeeping which, along with motherhood, was elevated to quasi-professional status. In addition, the War had introduced women into the work force on a larger scale than before, and this was extended during the 1920s by the increase in job opportunities for women, and by middle and upper class families permitting their daughters to follow a wider range of careers.¹⁰⁹ With a new sense of economic self-reliance, American women, looking different and engaged in new activities, expressed their growing independence by voicing their opposition to such iniquities as the double standard in sex,¹¹⁰ and by displaying a decided preference for petting, cigarettes, and gin.¹¹¹ In revolutionizing their self-image, American women had, as Ostrander points out, "won the battle ..."¹¹²

109. This argument is developed by Frederick Lewis Allen op.cit., pp.79-81, and by Ostrander in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), op.cit., pp.134-135.

110. Ostrander in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), ibid, p.134.

111. They also devoted their attention to far more serious issues. For further reference see Ann Firor Scott's excellent "After Suffrage: Southern Women in the Twenties," THE JOURNAL OF SOUTHERN HISTORY, Volume XXX, (August, 1964), pp.298-318.

112. Ostrander in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), op.cit., p.135. The critical assessment of the place occupied by American women during the 1920s is in urgent need of a complementary study evaluating the changed appearance, status, and behaviour of American men in the same period.

"The Revolt of the Highbrows."

In the 1920s the only constant was inconsistency. The events of the decade, judged from their own perspective as well as that of the present, appear to have been at once startling, chaotic, gaudy, and rent with conflict. The past had little meaning for a large number of Americans who viewed it with distaste if at all, and the future was difficult to forecast. The defence of traditional codes, at times nervous and shrill, failed to prevent the de facto emergence of a brash new culture dominated by reverence for business, faith in continuing prosperity, devotion to mass production and mass consumption, and conformity to the mediocre and tawdry values of the middle class majority. Unable to find anything reputable in this or the past, an informal but powerful group of "intellectuals" staged a full scale mutiny against prevailing values, a rebellion that F.L.Allen captions "The Revolt of the Highbrows."¹¹³

Whatever their actual right to Brahmin status, the men and women of the 1920s who assumed access to it

113. Frederick Lewis Allen, op.cit., Chapter IX, pp.188-203. Allen correctly acknowledges that the 'Highbrows' were geographically dispersed and idealistically disunited, yet tended to congregate around urban centers in general, and New York City in particular. His claim that the 'Highbrows' were mainly authors, artists, lawyers, doctors, academics and college-educated businessmen is both legitimate and questionable. It reflects the self-generated exclusiveness of an intellectual elite, and presumes that middle class status and middle class mentality are unconditionally one and the same.

looked upon the remainder of the nation with an air of aloofness and almost exquisite scorn. The past was a stupidity, the present a mediocrity, and life was meaningless. Traditional codes were punctuated by vulgarity and excess. Disillusioned at finding themselves in the midst of such a despicable environment, the so-called intellectuals of the decade sought not merely to criticise the system but, further, to dissociate themselves from it.¹¹⁴ In THE SMART SET, and later, the AMERICAN MERCURY, the 'Brahmins' of the decade found powerful vehicles for their outpourings of invective. F.L.Allen sums the case up, then, when he says that the AMERICAN MERCURY,

"poured critical acid upon sentimentality and evasion and academic pomposity in books and in life: it lambasted Babbitts, Rotarians, Methodists, and Reformers, ridiculed both the religion of Coolidge Prosperity, and what Mencken called the 'bilge of idealism,' and looked upon the American scene with raucous and profane laughter." 115

It seemed, then, that the only reputable activity was desperate rejection, and because their renunciations were almost unlimited, the 'Highbrows' are open to the justifiable but as yet unstated accusation that they were as prohibitive and stuffy as the life style they burlesqued.

114. The extent of dissociation is expertly measured in Malcolm Cowley, EXILE'S RETURN: A LITERARY ODYSSEY OF THE 1920s, (New York, 1972).

115. Frederick Lewis Allen, p.192. Subscriptions to the AMERICAN MERCURY totalled 77,000 by 1927. p.193.

Although they were largely heterogeneous in form, the 'Highbrows' of the Jazz Age subscribed to certain common assumptions that F.L.Allen summarizes as their credo: they supported the notion that American morality required a change permitting greater sexual freedom and objected to the championship of traditional morality by lobbyists who used legislation to enforce it; they denounced Prohibition, censorship, and reform, by insisting, instead, that the individual be freed from cloying creeds; they favoured secularization and were blatantly agnostic; they despised the ad-mass, consumer-oriented, media-fed culture that surrounded them; and they subjected the middle-mass of America to a vitriolic and almost unprecedented wave of iconoclasm.¹¹⁶ They laughed, and other Americans joined in with them. In the end, however, the laughter was hollow.

There were, as Allen points out,¹¹⁷ three main aspects of disillusionment. Firstly, a multitude of liaisons, singularly pleasurable, were variously as meaningless as romantic love and traditional seduction. Secondly, the 'Highbrows' wanted freedom, but for what? They smashed taboos without ever fully liberating themselves from them, and their unusual predicament was "their disillusionment with their own rebellion."¹¹⁸ Thirdly,

116. Ibid. See pp.194-200 for further development.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid., p.199, citing Walter Lippmann.

the 'intellectuals' affirmed the high place of scientific methods and proofs, but science was changing so rapidly that men could no longer be absolutely positive. This very point is made by F.L.Allen when he says that,

"Nothing, then, was sure; the purpose of life was undiscoverable; the end of life were less discoverable still; in all this fog there was no solid thing on which man could lay hold and say, This is real; this will abide." 119

It is significant, therefore, that the final discovery the 'Brahmins' made was that,

"They could revolt against stupidity and mediocrity, they could derive a meagre pleasure from regarding themselves with pity as members of a lost generation, but they could not find peace." 120

In this sense the long revered intellectual elite of the decade proved themselves to be more profane than they were sacred.¹²¹

Indeed, even the literary output of the decade's novelists has been called in for serious questioning. The classic example of this dispute is presented in Fine and Brown's THE AMERICAN PAST: CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS

119. Ibid, p.200.

120. Ibid, p.203.

121. Without diminishing their excellence in any way, the works of Dorothy Parker and H.L.Mencken tend to substantiate this point. See Brendan Gill (ed.), op.cit., and James T.Farrell (ed.), H.L.MENCKEN: PREJUDICES, A SELECTION, (New York, 1955).

OF THE GREAT ISSUES, where Bernard DeVoto and Frederick J. Hoffman debate the true value of the period's literature.¹²² DeVoto argues that the 'official' literature of the decade deprived man of his essential dignity, that the jaundiced perspective presented by novelists was inaccurate, inadequate, and unreliable, and that the fault was in the artists' perception rather than in society itself. Conversely, Hoffman claims that the literature of the 1920s was historically and artistically reliable, that the depiction of isolated and all but hopeless characters combatting hostile and barren surroundings was meaningful and accurate, and that the decade was highlighted by exciting and far-reaching literary innovations. The arguments on both sides are convincing, the issues are complex, and the debate awaits final resolution.

On all levels, then, the American 1920s are subject to equivocation and conflict. Detached from the firm foundations that had guided them through the past, Americans were coming to learn that the new way was to be adrift, that society and uncertainty were one and the same, and that the American Dream, no longer functioning

122. See Bernard DeVoto and Frederick J. Hoffman in Sidney Fine and Gerald Brown (eds.), THE AMERICAN PAST: CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE GREAT ISSUES, Volume 2, (New York, 1965). For further reference see Archibald MacLeish, THE IRRESPONSIBLES: A DECLARATION, (New York, 1940); Milton Plesur (ed.), INTELLECTUAL ALIENATION IN THE 1920s, (Lexington, 1970); and Richard Hofstadter, ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN AMERICAN LIFE, (London, 1964).

as a generally accessible aspiration, was anchored firmly in the past. America now experienced one of the most rapid periods of urban expansion in its history, a growth process that tuned the cities into the tensions of the 1920s.¹²³

URBANISM: NEW YORK CITY IN THE 1920s.

During the 1920s urbanism, a 'new' life style popularly associated with the cities, thrust its tentative and, in some senses, its impermanent way into the American consciousness. Defined by Louis Wirth as "that complex of traits which made up the characteristic modes of life in cities,"¹²⁴ urbanism was never as shrill as agrarianism,¹²⁵ and had no need to be. Urbanism expanded by its own

123. John D.Hicks, a noted critic of the period, states that "The spectacular growth of American cities during the 1920s affords at least as many opportunities for historical studies as there were cities and metropolitan centers." J.D.Hicks, "Research Opportunities in the 1920s," HISTORIAN, Volume XXV, (November, 1962), p.8.

124. Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, Volume XLIV, Number 1, (July, 1938), p.7. Other pioneer studies are listed in Blake McKelvey, THE EMERGENCE OF METROPOLITAN AMERICA, (New Jersey, 1968), pp.27-30

125. The urban perspective of the decade may be distorted if measured solely in terms of a rural past. For further reference to agrarianism see Don. S.Kirschner, CITY AND COUNTRY: RURAL RESPONSES TO URBANIZATION IN THE 1920s, (Westport, Connecticut, 1970), pp.57-61, and Clifford B.Anderson, "Agrarian Attitudes Toward the City, Business and Labour in the 1920s and 1930s," MISSISSIPPI QUARTERLY, Volume XIV, (Fall, 1961), pp.182-189.

volition. It lacked self-conscious aggrandizement,¹²⁶ and its arsenal was equipped with laughter rather than with ranting.¹²⁷ Urbanization had reached a new stage by the 1920s,¹²⁸ and the swing from rural to urban preponderance provided a forum that emphasised the components of the decade and generated the twenty-four characteristics that Wirth identifies in his theory of urbanism: large numbers in relation to high density of settlement; a cosmopolitan and at times deliberately heterogeneous atmosphere; a greater range of interpersonal relationships; spatial segregation delineated by ethnicity, economics, tastes, and preferences; weaker bonds of kinship and the

126. In THE PERILS OF PROSPERITY, 1914-1932, (Chicago, 1965), however, William E. Leuchtenburg suggests that "The city was self-conscious in its superiority to rural mores." p.226. In addition, McKelvey, op.cit., suggests that the city had a more assertive influence because, in a decade devoted to imitation and success, "The skyscraper rivaled the automobile as the symbol of success in the Twenties. One was the sign of a prosperous community, the other of an affluent family." p.48.

127. The Census of 1920 indicated that traditional America was losing its powers and, therefore, its ability to regulate. The enactment of Prohibition and the widespread ridicule surrounding its wholesale evasion exemplifies this point.

128. This generally accepted assertion can be verified in Wirth, op.cit., p.2; McKelvey, op.cit., pp.vii-viii; and in Constance McLaughlin Green's THE RISE OF URBAN AMERICA. (New York, 1965), Chapter 6, "The Swing of the Pendulum," pp.128-156.

substitution of formally controlled mechanisms; the formation of many casual and few deep relationships; a greater dependence upon other persons as secondary rather than primary contacts in the provision of essentials; impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental intercommunications; a high level of sophistication, and action governed by rationality; a respect for utility and efficiency, and a reliance upon the function of corporations; a division of labour parallel to individual specialization; communication through indirect mediums and representatives; an urban milieu born of differentiation and specialization; the value of recognition and the use of uniforms to denote the role but obscure the identity of the wearer; a susceptibility to glaring contrasts such as splendour against squalor, riches against poverty, intelligence above ignorance, and order beside chaos; separation of place of work from place of residence; segregation of settlement according to occupation, national origin, colour, income, status and taste; the acceptance that different parts of the city have different functions, and that the city is an abruptly delineated mosaic; the competition, aggrandizement, and mutual exploitation common to densely populated and heterogeneous communities; the loneliness and nervous tension associated with city life; the obfuscation of caste lines and class structures by high mobility rates; commitment to a number of allegiances rather than undivided constancy to any one cause;

susceptibility to rapid turnovers in group membership, mobility of residence, and unpredictable and problematical behaviour; and finally, vulnerability to the levelling influence of the city where individuality is displaced by categorization.¹²⁹ In the light of these characteristics, the juxtaposition of rural against urban during the 1920s is in need of a fresh outlook beginning with the pre-supposition that urbanism as a way of life is complex rather than bad.

Allowing for both quality and quantity of change, urbanism appealed to city-oriented and ethnically diverse elements sympathetic towards experimentation and radicalism, and aware that the dirge of the American Dream had been sounded. Standing in the midst of a transitional period of life in urban centers coupled with longing for a pioneer tradition, this group understood that the way a life was lived was more important than where it was lived. They were also aware that rural-urban disparities were becoming obscured as rural America succumbed to the lures

129. This is a summary of the characteristics enumerated in Wirth, op.cit., pp.9-18. Complementary perspectives can be found in: Niles Carpenter, THE SOCIOLOGY OF CITY LIFE, (New York, 1931); William F.Ogburn, SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CITIES: A BASIS FOR NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE CITIES IN AMERICAN LIFE, (Chicago, 1937); Louis Mumford, THE CULTURE OF CITIES, (New York, 1938); Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (eds.), THE HISTORIAN AND THE CITY, (Cambridge, Mass.,); Louis Wirth in Albert J.Reiss Jr. (ed.), ON CITIES AND SOCIAL LIFE: SELECTED PAPERS, (Chicago, 1964); Jeffrey K.Hadden and Edgar F.Borgatta (eds.), AMERICAN CITIES: THEIR SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS, (Chicago, 1965); R.N.Morris, URBAN SOCIOLOGY, (London, 1968); William Michelson, MAN AND HIS URBAN ENVIRONMENT: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH, (London, 1970); and Harold E.Nottridge, THE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN LIVING, (Boston, 1972).

of industrial and urban modernism, and that, by some ironic twist of fate, agrarianism was being recast in the mould of urban America.¹³⁰ This claim is supported by Don S. Kirschner in his suggestion that,

"From cost accounting and advertising to motion pictures, farmers were snapping up the procedures and products of a new and more realistic way of life. But what might happen if they were made to face the fact that the images and values that they cherished were contradicted by the life they were living?"¹³¹

Opponents of urbanism were, therefore, unable to harness

130. The Census of 1920 produced statistical evidence that, for the first time in American history, the majority of Americans were dwelling in cities rather than living in rural areas. These cities were seldom static and were conducive to rapid and radical change. The claim that there was an urban majority is qualified in that, for Census purposes, the definition of 'urban' applied to any population group of 2,500 or more. Judged in terms of the decade it inaugurated, when the finer details had not been scrutinized, however, the Census openly challenged the security of 'non-urban' America. In this sense, the importance of the Census has not been overplayed. For further reference to the Census of 1920, see McKelvey, op.cit., pp.31-32, and The Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, RECENT SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES, two volumes, (Westport, Connecticut, 1970), Chapter One, "The Population of the Nation," pp.1-58, and Chapter Nine, "The Rise of Metropolitan Communities," pp.443-496.

131. Kirschner, op.cit., p.74. The media played an important part in this process, and its influence is discussed in McKelvey, op.cit., p.8. McKelvey adds that sodalities such as the New York City Club stimulated vitality and sought to integrate city and country. p.57.

the city to their own needs,¹³² and this disability, as Wirth so shrewdly pointed out in 1938, was an outgrowth of the tremendous vitality emanating from the cities themselves:

"The influence which cities exert upon the social life of man are greater than the ratio of the urban population would indicate, for the city is not only in ever larger degrees the dwelling-place and the workshop of modern man, but it is the initiating and controlling center of economic, political, and cultural life that has drawn the most remote parts of the world into its orbit and woven diverse areas, peoples, and activities into a cosmos."

133

The city alone, then, was an active and important agent

132. The temper of the Twenties was exacerbated by the added strains endemic in the brazen new presence of American cities which Morton White suggests were "too big, too noisy, too dusky, too dirty, too smelly, too commercial, too crowded, too full of immigrants, too full of Jews, too full of Irishmen, Italians, Poles, too fast, too artificial, destructive of conversation, destructive of communication, too greedy, too capitalistic, too full of automobiles, too full of smog, too full of dust, too heartless, too intellectual, too scientific, insufficiently poetic, too lacking in manners, too mechanical, destructive of family tribal and patriotic feeling." Morton White cited in Handlin and Burchard (eds.), op.cit., p.87. Hostility toward the city was neither new nor unique to the 1920s, but its intensity was unprecedented and raw. Indeed, the decade climaxed what Morton and Lucia White describe as a "powerful tradition of anti-urbanism in the history of American thought." Morton and Lucia White, THE INTELLECTUAL VERSUS THE CITY: FROM THOMAS JEFFERSON TO FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1962), p.3.

133. Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," op.cit., p.2. Taking this argument a step further, it is possible that it was the partial merging of rural-urban characteristics and an understanding of the interdependent relationship between the city and its hinterland that, like the solely urban example advanced by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan in BEYOND THE MELTING POT: THE NEGROES, PUERTO RICANS, JEWS, ITALIANS, AND IRISH OF NEW YORK CITY, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970), earned America the right to regard itself as both a cauldron and a salad bowl.

in the development of a new style of life. Unlike its predecessors in previous decades, the city of the 1920s, transported by unprecedented and powerful agents covering the full range from the automobile through to the wireless, was able to extend its influence into the most remote outposts of American life. In doing so, it reduced barriers traditionally dividing agrarianism from urbanism and, from the 1920s onwards, the city became as much the womb as it was the tomb of American life.¹³⁴

Because it functioned as the prima donna of American urbanism during the 1920s the metropolis of New York, with its one static quality of change and its one form of formlessness, is a legitimate single symbol for the decade's collectively urban nature.¹³⁵ As the largest, most densely populated and heterogeneous community in the

134. The urban nature of the decade is important because the city and the decade found harmony in their mutual discord. Indeed, time and place converged with a precision almost without precedence in the annals of American experience.

135. This claim is substantiated by Louis Wirth in "Urbanism as a Way of Life." op.cit., p.9. Wirth claims that the characteristics of city life are accentuated in direct ratio to the size, density, and heterogeneity of a community. Whether or not New York was the most or the least American city is, ultimately, irrelevant. It was American.

United States during the 1920s,¹³⁶ New York's leadership was never seriously questioned,¹³⁷ and extending its influence through its own pronounced and almost uncontrollable momentum, New York City was at once the matrix and the mausoleum of the nation.

Punctuated by ambiguity and paradox, New York City was an index to the future and a warning to the past.¹³⁸ It represented if it did not create a state of mind which, influenced by a specific though portable and intangible

136. As the hub of the nation the area of New York City, which included the five boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Richmond, and Brooklyn, had an almost unlimited boundary.

McKelvey, op.cit., p.4, maintains that New York City at all times maintained a numerical lead. His claim is confirmed by The United States Bureau of the Census, STATISTICAL ABSTRACT OF THE UNITED STATES, (1965), p.12.

The degree of heterogeneity in New York City is the main theme advanced by Glazer and Moynihan, op.cit.

137. This is substantiated by McKelvey, op.cit., p.8. Chicago, which was the closest rival for the status of leadership, lacked the centralized dynamism of New York City. It was more the center of the Midwest and less the heart of the whole nation.

138. In Leuchtenburg, op.cit., this point is highlighted by the following citation: "'New York,' wrote the Denver Post in 1930, 'has been a cesspool into which immigrant trash has been dumped for so long that it can scarcely be considered American any more.' New York was the seat of the Union Theological Seminary and modernism, the home of the nightclub and the gangster. of Wall Street and Tammany Hall; it was, as Bryan had so long ago said of the East, 'the enemy country.' It was a city cruel and impersonal, the home of the rootless, a place where, as one writer noted, 'nobody seemed to have parents.'" pp.226-227.

physical base,¹³⁹ provided a way of life which made it the literary, intellectual and cultural capital of the United States.¹⁴⁰ As such, New York City was the 'high place' from which a large number of unexpatriated Americans could survey the decade as a battleground or locus for the controversial issues of experimentation and conservatism. As the Florence of a 'new world' in a new century, New York City symbolised the constant rejection of rural values as well as the championship of new urban standards.

139. The city is a "state of mind" associated with a physical place and utility of place. This definition eliminates the difficult position critics have faced in allowing that ruralites may have urban tastes and preferences, just as the city-dweller might empathise with the selection of rural traditions. It also accommodates the concept that the city is, like modern science, in a state of continual flux. Thus, the city cannot be spoken of in static terms. It is also interesting to note that the 1920s began the process in the motion picture industry of creating an amalgamated American city drawn from San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Chicago and New York City. I am indebted to Professor Barry Karl of the University of Chicago for this last point.

140. This claim is substantiated in Van Wyck Brooks, DAYS OF THE PHOENIX: THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES I REMEMBER, (New York, 1957), p.106; Walter Allen, THE URGENT WEST: THE AMERICAN DREAM AND MODERN MAN, (New York, 1969), p.65; and Oscar Handlin in Handlin and Burchard (eds.), op.cit., pp.1-26. I am further indebted to Dr. Alfred Kazin who suggested to me that the cultural preponderance of New York City during the 1920s was intimately related to the growth of periodicals such as THE NEW YORKER, THE DIAL, THE NATION, and THE REPUBLIC, and that another generating agency was the concentration, in New York, of new and receptive publishing houses owned by 'fifty-percent' Americans such as A.A.Knopf's which began to supersede the 'one hundred-percent' and conservative firms such as Charles Scribner's.

The lasting legacy is that, in unleashing the possibilities of its own imaginative landscape, and in providing a forum for it, the City of New York promoted a native outlet for indigenous creativity.¹⁴¹

141. Artistic interest in the city was not, however, new. Indeed, American authors had been fascinated by the city ever since it became a reality. For further reference to the literary implications of the American city see: George Arthur Dunlap, THE CITY IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL, 1789-1900: A STUDY OF AMERICAN NOVELS PORTRAYING CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS IN NEW YORK, PHILADELPHIA, AND BOSTON, (New York, 1965); Blanche Housman Gelfant, THE AMERICAN CITY NOVEL, (Norman, 1970); Irving Howe, "The City in Literature," COMMENTARY, Volume LI, Number 5, (May, 1971); Anselm L. Strauss, IMAGES OF THE AMERICAN CITY, (New York, 1961); and David R. Weimer, THE CITY AS METAPHOR, (New York, 1966).

CHAPTER II

CALL IT SLEEP

The dichotomous positioning of the American Dream during the approximate period of the 1920s is a thematic highlight in Henry Roth's epic novel, CALL IT SLEEP.¹ From the prologue "I pray thee ask no questions this is that Golden Land"² to the electrifying outcome of Roth's nascent masterpiece, opportunity is measured by improbability, and success amounts to little more than the child protagonist's tentative survival in the cold and hostile environment of New York City.³ At the outset, David Schearl's prospects are bleak. He is rejected by his father, Albert, because of his un-American appearance, and the steamer on which he has made the crossing, the Peter Stuyvesant, "delivered the immigrants from the stench and throb of the steerage to the stench and throb of New York tenements."⁴ Immediately, and this point is made by A. Sidney Knowles in "The Fiction of Henry Roth," the

1. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970). The prologue is set in 1907. The main body of action occurs between 1911 and 1913.

2. Ibid, p.3.

3. Roth says of his environment that "Call It Sleep is set on the East Side, but it violates the truth about what the East Side was like back then. Ninth Street was only a fragmentary model for what I was doing. In reality I took the violent environment of Harlem ... and projected it back onto the East Side. It became a montage of milieus, in which I was taking elements of one neighborhood and grafting them onto another." Henry Roth in David A. Bronsen, "A Conversation With Henry Roth," THE PARTISAN REVIEW, Volume XXXVI, (1969), p.267.

4. Roth, op.cit., p.3. Life in America, punctuated by suffering, has so changed Albert Schearl that his wife, Genya, does not recognize him.

Schearls are established as travellers in an alien culture.⁵

Indeed, David's story opens with his awareness at the age of six that the world has been created without thought of him, and he is an inconsiderable part of the American Dream. Rather than making progress along an ordained and fortuitous path, David suffers instead the physical torment inflicted by his father and the streets, and the psychological torment endemic in paternal repudiation, fear of the cellar, and the ordeal of loathsome sexual advances made by the crippled but willing Annie. Estranged from his environment, David Schearl's credo is formulated by his mother who tells hi

"'This is the way of the years, my son.
Each new one shows you both hands this
way - !' She held out her two closed
hands before her. 'Here, choose!' And
opened them. 'And they're both empty.
We do what we can. But the bitter thing
is to strive - and save none but yourself.'"⁶

In this sense, David's experience is that of thrust and withdrawal.

Because of this quality Roth is able to place his hero in either foreground or background, and he enriches the portrait of David by concentrating instead on another member of the family. In the second book, "The Picture," for example, the major part of the narrative is devoted to the arrival and assimilation of David's maternal aunt, Bertha,

5. A. Sidney Knowles Jr., "The Fiction of Henry Roth," MODERN FICTION STUDIES, Volume XI, (Winter, 1965/6), p.397.

6. Roth, op.cit., p.125.

an untidy woman who is distressingly homely and disarmingly honest. Bertha has many of her nephew's child-like qualities and an equal agility in advance and retreat. She does not miss the homeland⁷ and her love of America has much to do with the availability and cheapness of clothes to wear; for her, this is nothing short of a miracle. But when Albert rips one of her undergarments in half she moans,

"Why did I ever set foot on this stinking land? Why did I ever come here? Ten hours a day in a smothering shop - paper flowers! Rag flowers! Ten long hours, afraid to pee too often because the foreman might think I was shirking." 8

The immediate counterpoint to the American harvest is introduced when Genya returns home with a picture that reminds her of Austria:

"a picture of a small patch of ground full of tall green stalks, at the foot of which, tiny blue flowers grew ... 'That's corn. That's how it grows. It grows out of the earth, you know, the sweet corn in the summer.'" 9

The picture reintroduces a note of promise and the prospect of meeting Bertha's suitor the night it is brought home brings an uncustomary sense of animation to the Schearl household.

Bertha states her faith in the American Dream that night. Her hope is that,

7. Genya feels that the only reason her sister does not miss the homeland is that she has not been in America long enough.

8. Roth, op.cit., p.208.

9. Ibid, p.227.

"'A little while we'll struggle; we'll pee in the dark. And then we'll have a home. And when we'll have a home we'll have a decent home. Thick furniture with red legs such as I see in the store windows. Everything covered with glass. Handsome chandeliers! A phonograph! We'll work our way up. 'Stimm hitt' like bosses! What bliss to wake up in the morning without chilling the marrow! A white sink! A toilet inside! A bath-tub! A genuine bath-tub for my suffering hide in July!" 10

She will do better than Albert who is too pious and inactive to succeed in a land where Jews can make money.

Having introduced and highlighted examples of American materialism and opportunity, Roth switches from the pocket to the soul as Albert announces that David is to attend a cheder.¹¹ From this point onwards, David's America becomes even more of a nightmare. The child shows himself to be a good student but his motivating force is fear of the rabbi's punishment and his successes isolate him from the other boys. He learns the story of Isaiah, of the angel cleansing Isaiah's lips with burning coal, and of Isaiah's ultimate discovery of God. He cannot comprehend that coal, which makes ashes, could cleanse: he does not want ordinary coal

10. Ibid, p.246.

11. Some critics maintain that CALL IT SLEEP is an essentially religious novel. For development of this concept refer to Leslie A. Fiedler, "Henry Roth's Neglected Masterpiece," COMMENTARY, Volume XXX, (1960), pp.102-107; James Ferguson, "Symbolic Patterns in Call It Sleep," TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE, Volume XIV, (January, 1969), pp.211-221; and Kenneth M. Nelson, "A Religious Metaphor," RECONSTRUCTIONIST, Volume XXXI, Number 15, (November, 1965), pp.7-16.

in his own quest for God, but 'angel-coal,' though he does not know where to get it. It is his mother, therefore, who assists in the discovery process by defining God for David. God was,

"brighter than the day was brighter than the night ... if darkest midnight was bright enough to see whether a black hair was straight or curly. Brighter than day." 12

On the morning of the first Passover night David is by the docks, looking out over the water. He sees God:

"His gaze shifted to the left. As the cloud began to pass, a long slim lathe of sunlight burned silver on the water.
- Gee, didn't see it before!
Widened to a swath, a lane, widened.
- Like a ship just went.
A plain, flawless, sheer as foil to the serried margins. His eyes dazzled.
- Fire on the water. White.
His lids grew heavy.
In the water she said. White. Brighter than day. Whiter. And He was." 13

The vision is given a particularly modern twist which also relates to the Jewish experience in the Diaspora when David meets up with a hostile gang of Gentile children who ask him if he wants to see magic and then force him to do so by placing a metal sword in the rail tracks. He does this and,

"Like a paw ripping through all the sable fibres of the earth, power, gigantic, fetterless, thudded into day! And light, unleashed, terrific light bellowed out of iron lips. The street quaked and roared,

12. Roth, op.cit., pp.324-325.

13. Ibid, pp.332-333.

and like a tortured thing, the sheet zinc sword, leapt writhing, fell back, consumed with radiance. Blinded, stunned by the brunt of brilliance, David staggered back."

"a coal like - like Isaiah ... where the car tracks run I saw it. On Tenth Street." 14

The rail then becomes the preoccupation of the novel and the title of the fourth book.

Before David plunges metal into the rail again in order to achieve an artificially altered state of consciousness, he undergoes a series of experiences that draw the novel together and comment on the poverty and treachery of his surroundings. Having seen fresh evidence of his father's brutality, David is then told by boys in the street that they have been watching a lady, naked, bathing herself, from the front and the back, and in a moment of revulsion against the others, David realizes that it was his mother that they were watching. He is then befriended by and ultimately subjected to the chicanery of a Christian boy, Leo Dugovka, a Polish-American. To cement the friendship, Leo promises David a broken rosary if they will visit Bertha's step-daughters. David makes the first visit alone, and the oldest girl, Esther, asks him to escort her to the lavatory, which is in the cellar. Bertha's dream of a gleaming white toilet is in reality described as,

"A tiny, sickly-grey window, matted with cobwebs, themselves begrimed with stringy grime, cast a wan gleam on the filth-streaked toilet bowl." 15

14. Ibid, p.340 and p.345.

15. Ibid, p.425.

During the second visit Leo lures Esther into the cellar for a carnal exchange, a confidence that is betrayed to the Sternowitz parents by Polly, their younger daughter.

David flees from this experience to the cheder. He lies to the two rabbis that his mother is dead, his father a Christian organ-player, and that he was begotten in a corn-field. When this is related to his parents it confirms Albert's worst suspicions and he repudiates his wife and son. The boy drops the rosary, further evidence of his and his mother's betrayal, flees again, and is discovered shocked and unconscious, but largely unharmed, after plunging a sword into the rail on Avenue D. The incident reunites the family and Albert recognizes David as his legitimate son. David felt,

"not pain, nor terror, but strangest
triumph, strangest acquiescence. One
might as well call it sleep." 16

David Schearl's story ends, therefore, on what Walter Allen has described as a "state of aspiration amounting to ecstasy." 17

The end of the novel does little, however, to change the seemingly unalterable fact that the gutter life of the new world was a far cry from the attractive tradition of individual and corporate hope that has been invested in the American Dream and the complexity of the American

16. Ibid, p.599.

17. Walter Allen, "Two Neglected American Novelists," LONDON MAGAZINE, Volume II, (May, 1962), p.78.

relationship with Europe.¹⁸ In this sense, therefore, CALL IT SLEEP is not a novel of growth as much as it is a novel of destruction. Indeed, the Schearls and their neighbours are severely restricted by the ethnic, linguistic, religious and financial barriers that prevent them from all but the most menial participation in American life. Instead of the generosity, the liberty, the sense of fair play and the sense of possibility held out by the American system, Roth's characters are subjected to filth, shame, ugliness, hostility, betrayal, violence, and punishment, and the confrontation is made on such an uncompromising scale that the American Eden is reduced to the status of a modern Jungle without rule or rationale.

The scene that Roth depicted was not entirely new. Rather, it conforms to an established American tradition of literary disenchantment. As a statement of social history, however, CALL IT SLEEP has the added radical implication of suggesting that the rot had set in prior to the outbreak of the First World War, and that disillusionment and degradation were not departures from what later became known as 'Normalcy,' but were the norm itself. In this sense, the turmoil of the Twenties was an upheaval in breadth rather than exclusively in depth. Changing social values, incidents of intolerance, rebellion against 'accepted' patterns of behaviour, the

18. This relates in particular to the claim made by Robert Spiller and others that "The American Dream has become part of the cultural tradition of Europe." Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas J. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, and Richard M. Ludwig (eds.), LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES: HISTORY, (London, 1969), p.215.

need for new definitions in a changing world, and an awareness of the gap between American idealism and American realism were present and had perhaps always been present for the gutter generations of American immigrants.

This trend became increasingly notable in the American cities after the turn of the century and is particularly true of Roth's lower East Side which was additionally,

"a new and violent world, as different from Brownsville as quiet from turmoil. Here on 9th Street it wasn't the sun that swamped one as one left the doorway, it was sound - an avalanche of sound. There were countless children, there were countless baby carriages, there were countless mothers. And to the screams, rebukes and bickerings of these, a seemingly endless file of hucksters joined their bawling cries. On Avenue D horse-cars clattered and banged. Avenue D was thronged with beer wagons, garbage carts and coal trucks. There were many automobiles, some blunt and rangey, some with high straw poops, honking. Beyond Avenue D, at the end of a stunned, ruined block that began with shacks and smithies and seltzer bottling works and ended in a junk heap, was the East River on which many boat horns sounded." 19

It is a powerful and new cosmopolitan mode, and Roth is the master of his setting.

19. Roth, op.cit., p.187. The importance of New York City in the context of the selected novels will be examined at greater length in Chapter Nine of this thesis.

CHAPTER III

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN

Using the same cosmopolitan mode and a locale of poverty similar to that adopted by Henry Roth in CALL IT SLEEP,¹ Betty Smith's novel of sentimental realism, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN,² is a more blatant statement of and about the American Dream during the period in and around the 1920s. Unlike the case of David Shearl, and despite any evidence to the contrary, the tone of Francie Nolan's story is largely optimistic, and life, though callous, is also imminently improvable. Essentially, this is a result of the influence asserted by Katie Nolan, Francie's mother, a realist who also permits her family to enjoy a sense of escape. Francie is always allowed, for example, to empty her coffee, the one household luxury, down the sink. Accordingly, she can experience what it is like to be able to waste. For Francie,

"It was one of the links between the ground-down poor and the wasteful rich. The girl felt that even if she had less than anybody in Williamsburg, somehow she had more. She was richer because she had something to waste." 3

Indeed, the distinctive feature of A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN is its aspiration that poverty can be an

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1. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970).
 2. Betty Smith, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, (New York, 1968).
 3. Ibid, p.16. This excess is repeated when Katie tips a waiter later in the novel and says, "For once I wanted us to feel like millionaires. And if twenty cents can make us seem rich, it's a cheap price to pay." pp.317-18.

enriching experience. This point is emphasized in the later stages of the novel when Francie and her brother, Neelie, on the eve of their mother's marriage to the comparatively affluent McShane, express happiness that their baby sister will never know the hardships that they had known as children, but are sorry that she will be deprived of some of the fun that they had experienced.⁴ This colours the whole novel. At the very beginning, Francie is enjoying the 'serenity' of a Saturday afternoon in Brooklyn during the Summer of 1912. At this point, Smith introduces a safety-valve for all of Francie's story in the form of a tree that 'likes' poor people and serves as a buffer against impoverishment:

"The one tree in Francie's yard was neither a pine nor a hemlock. It had pointed leaves which grew along green switches which radiated from the bough and made a tree which looked like a lot of opened green umbrellas. Some people called it the Tree of Heaven. No matter where its seeds fell, it made a tree which struggled to reach the sky. It grew in boarded up lots and out of neglected rubbish heaps and it was the only tree that grew out of cement. It grew lushly, but only in the tenements districts." 5

4. Ibid, pp.413-14. This point is also made by W. Tasker Witham who holds that Francie's early childhood and adolescence "in a home with a likable but improvident father, have been very hard; and her later adolescence, after her father's death, had been even harder. Yet she and her brother, as they discuss their mother's forthcoming marriage with a second and rather well-to-do husband, can feel sorry for their baby sister who, if she will never know the hard times they have known, will never know the fun their father brought into the home." W.Tasker Witham, THE ADOLESCENT IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL, 1920-1960, (New York, 1960) p.80. See also Smith, op.cit., and the tale of the Christmas Tree, pp.176-179.

5. Smith, op.cit., p.7.

11

In conjunction with the children's rather amusing 'commercial' activities with characters like Carney, Cheap Charley, and Gimpy, this environment supports an American Dream of moderation with its boldest expressions couched in terms of nickels and dimes. The children keep half of the money that they earn. The rest, faithful to the ethic of thrift, is deposited in a tin nailed to the bottom of a cupboard, and this cache is the Nolans' bank for the future.

Although money and the lack of it are crucial elements throughout the novel, the author reduces its importance by compensating through other factors, an example being Francie's determination to systematically read every book in the local library, a goal that is indirectly rewarded when, at fourteen, she is earning more than her Uncle Willie Flittman earns at forty.⁶ In addition to the requirement that the children read a page from each of The Bible and The Collected Works of Shakespeare every night before bed,⁷ Francie's resolution at the library helps to provide her with a concrete avenue of escape without ever concealing the harsher elements of life. She is aware, for example, that her father, a drunkard, has all but given up hope, and Johnny himself says,

"I drink because I don't stand a chance
and I know it ... I drink because I got
responsibilities that I can't handle." 8

6. Ibid, pp.336-337

7. Mary Rommely promises Katie that if the Rommely grandchildren read from these texts they will know that there is a world beyond Williamsburg and that, with developed imaginations, they will have a retreat from the hardships and disappointments of life. Ibid. pp.75-76.

8. Ibid, p.34.

Johnny knows, and perhaps he knows that Francie knows too.

The flow of Francie's tale is interrupted in a complementary manner by a prolonged flashback that relates the story of her parentage, an earlier generation of the American Dream. In this vein, Mary Rommely muses that it was hard enough in the old land and harder still in the new one. The only saving grace and reason for remaining in America was that class barriers were subject to high mobility, that,

"In the old country a man is given to the past. Here he belongs to the future. In this land, he may be what he will, if he has the good heart and the way of working honestly at the right things." 9

Indeed, she marvels that Francie is born to parents who can read and write, and she instructs her daughter to save hard in order that, before she dies, Katie will have some land to leave to her children.

Parentage traps and smothers Johnny Nolan, but it gives his wife the reserve to continue.

"Johnny knew he was doomed and accepted it. Katie wouldn't accept it. She started a new life where her old one left off.

She exchanged her tenderness for capability. She gave up her dreams and took over hard realities in their place.

Katie had a fierce desire for survival which made her a fighter. Johnny had a hankering after immortality which made him a useless dreamer." 10

When Johnny celebrates his coming-of-age with a three-day drinking spree Katie moves house and becomes the new building's janitor in order that they can live free of rent.

9. Ibid, p.75.

10. Ibid, p.88.

The move was also precipitated by the indiscretion of one of Katie's sisters, Sissy, who left a packet of condoms, suggestively brand-named "American Dreams,"¹¹ where Francie and Neelie could find them. When the children hang the condoms from the apartment window Katie resolves that they must, with haste, leave the neighbourhood.

With the transfer of household completed, Smith starts to chronicle Francie's growing disenchantment with the world around her. She is particularly disillusioned by the conditions at her new school which was ugly, brutalizing, and overcrowded. Even worse, the school's malpractices expose democracy as a sham by regulating a rigid class system under which the children of the more prosperous parents were given single desks in good positions while the poorer children were forced to sit together and were not so well placed.¹² Indeed, the situation was so bad that the poorer children were denied even the right to lavatory breaks. This has an unfortunate outcome for Francie who wets her pants. It is remedied, however, by Aunt Sissy who threatens the teacher with dire warnings of what would happen should such practices continue.

In many senses, however, American mobility provides Francie with a means of escape and she removes herself from her immediate environment by making excursions into new

11. Ibid, p.108.

12. This injustice promotes a decline in artistic merit as Smith launches into an embarrassingly stereotyped and mawkish portrait of the maiden teacher. Ibid, p.135.

territory. While outwalking in a neighbouring and not so poor section of Brooklyn, for example, Francie chances upon what was, at that stage, her own American Dream:

"There was a brooding quality about the neighbourhood, a quiet, deep, timeless, shabby peace. Francie was as happy as though, like Alice, she had stepped through a magic mirror. She was in an enchanted land.

She walked on further and came to a little old school. Its old bricks glowed garnet in the late afternoon sun. There was no fence around the school yard and the school grounds were grass and not cement ...

Francie's heart turned over. This was it. This was the school she wanted to go to." 13

Undeterred by a strict rule about attending the school in her own district, Francie enlists the aid of her father. They determine to pick out a house at random for its address, inform the old school that they were moving, and thus qualify for entry into the new school.¹⁴ Conditions are immediately different. The pupils at the new school were sixth and seventh generation Americans, and they were not so prone to meanness, cruelty, undue corporal punishment, or brutalization:

"~~Their~~ parents were too American, too aware of the rights granted them by their Constitution to accept injustices meekly. They could not be bulldozed and exploited as could the immigrants and the second generation Americans." 15

Francie was very happy at the new school which confirmed

13. Ibid, p.147.

14. Ibid, pp.150-51. They are successful. Neelie remains at the old school and his address is unchanged. It is inconsistent, therefore, that the ruse is not detected.

15. Ibid, p.152.

her faith in possibility because,

"It showed her that there were other worlds
beside the world she had been born into and
that these other worlds were not unattainable." 16

Indeed, Francie moves in an expanding circle of mobility.

The peculiar ability of the Nolan children to transcend their condition is illustrated in a tale of the family's Christmas. Christmas was a happy time in Brooklyn, and while the children were deprived the opportunities that money brings, they created their own alternative levels of contentment. Too poor to make purchases, for example, Francie still marvels at the wonders, provided free, in shop windows. Moreover, there was a neighbourhood tradition that unsold Christmas trees were 'given' away on Christmas Eve. These trees were thrown at their would-be owners who, if they were not knocked down, could keep them. Francie and Neelie win the biggest tree and this covers their Christmas with a mantle of magic. Katie is less moved and she muses that the children,

"think they're mighty lucky that they're
living and that it's Christmas again.
They can't see that we live on a dirty
street in a dirty house among people
who aren't much good. Johnny and the
children can't see how pitiful it is that
our neighbors have to make happiness out
of this filth and dirt." 17

And the Christmas tree was,

16. Ibid, p.154.

17. Ibid, p.180. At this point Katie realizes that it is education and not money that will ensure the children's progress. Because Francie can be counted upon to fight for her education, the less motivated Neelie must be given first priority. See pp.180-81.

"a prisoner in a tin wash bucket in a tenement front room." 18

Katie lives in the present and near future. She will not accept any form of compromise.

This refusal to accept anything less than reality begins to assert an influence on Francie whose child's-eye view is changing as she starts to penetrate beneath the surface of life. In 1916, Francie's fourteenth year, this process is accelerated when a child molester invades the neighbourhood. A girl on Francie's block is sexually violated and then murdered. If normal sex was something of a mystery on the block, criminal sex was an open book:

"Parents went into action. The children were told (and to hell with the right words) about the fiend and the horrible things he did." 19

Johnny was so worried about Francie that he obtained a gun. When most people were beginning to feel secure again, the pervert made a fresh attack.

Entering the long narrow hall of her building, Francie checked to ensure that no one was lurking, and then went in: as she put her foot on the first stair at the end of the passage, she saw him and was rendered motionless by the sight of his exposed penis. At that moment Katie, unseen, was walking quietly down the stairs. She moved calmly back up the stairs, got the gun, aimed it, and keeping it aimed,

18. Ibid, p.183.

19. Ibid, p.220.

put it under her apron. She then hurried down the stairs and shot the man in the stomach. A doctor is called in and he encourages Francie to forget the incident:

"'I'm going to give you something to put you to sleep. When you wake up, just remember that you had a bad dream. That's all it was; a bad dream. Hear?'"

"When Francie woke the next morning, papa was there to tell her it was all a dream. And as time passed it did seem like a dream to Francie. It left no ugliness in her memories.... The terror of the stairs had been brief - a bare three minutes in time - and terror had served as an anesthetic." 20

The incident is pushed further to the back of Francie's consciousness by the death of her father.

During the Christmas of 1915, Johnny Nolan learned that his wife was pregnant again. He goes out and returns sober. He is neither drinking nor working, and when dismissed from the Waiters' Union, he is a broken man. He dies three days later. The insurance money pays for his funeral expenses and the tin can in the cupboard is prised open in order to purchase his grave site. The tin bank was fourteen years old. Its use has ended because, as Katie expresses it,

"'We don't need it anymore. You see, we own a bit of land now.' She placed the folded deed on top of the clumsy star bank." 21

The children do their own mourning, and confronted again with the problem of evil and unfairness, Francie relinquishes her belief in God. In this sense, she turns her back on

20. Ibid, p.228 and p.230.

21. Ibid, p.271.

a major part of her childhood. From this point onwards the finances of the Nolan household deteriorate until they are rescued by the intercession of McGarrity, the owner of the saloon. This intervention is a cunningly employed device that reiterates the author's stance towards the American Dream. Indeed, McGarrity's pathetic dream world exposes just how hollow material wealth can be when it is accompanied by spiritual poverty. McGarrity used Johnny's tales of the Nolan family as a surrogate for his unfaithful wife and his insipid children. As Johnny was inextricably tied up to McGarrity's dreams, McGarrity lost them when Johnny died. At the very time that Katie and her family were struggling for survival, McGarrity got an idea:

"He had more money than he knew how to spend, and nothing else. Maybe through Johnny's children he could buy the way of dreaming again." 22

Katie, who is, perhaps, Smith's mouthpiece, permits the children to work for McGarrity until her pregnancy is over, but insists that he not visit them again, thus dispelling his chance to recapture the dream.

Francie's dreams are also subject to modification, Since Johnny's death she had stopped writing saccharine little stories and had put different facets of the tough life she knew to paper. Her teacher demands, however, that beauty is the only truth, and that,

"Drunkenness is neither truth nor beauty. It's a vice. Drunkards belong in jail, not in stories. And poverty. There is

22. Ibid, p.271.

no excuse for that. There's work enough for all who want it. People are poor because they're too lazy to work. There's nothing beautiful about laziness.

... Hunger is not beautiful. It is also unnecessary. We have well organized charities. No one need go hungry." 23

Miss Garnder then reviews Francie's graduation play and rejects it because it is sordid.²⁴ When Francie discovers that sordid means filthy, she burns all of her stories except the four about her father.

Francie's disquiet is reduced when her mother gives birth to a new child. She realizes that her mother loves Neelie more than she loves her, but she understands that Katie needs her more than she needed Neelie. That was as good, perhaps better even, than being loved. On May 28, 1916, Annie Laurie Nolan is born.

McGarritty does not dismiss the children as he had planned. America was undergoing great changes and the saloon functioned as a forum for discussion. These changes are emphasized by four italicized pages that serve as a prelude to the dislocations of the 1920s: Prohibition; the vote for women; Mrs Wilson's influence during the period of the President's ill health; automobiles; airplanes; motion pictures; the wireless; new medicines; electricity; the youngsters and the dance; Americanization by changing names (Schulst to Scott); the possible entry into war, opposition against it, and support for it; and the impact of mechanization and industrialization.²⁵

23. Ibid, p.284.

24. The play is a book within a book. It deals with the dichotomy between potential and possibility, aspiration and reality. Ibid, p.285.

25. Ibid, pp.305-308.

Francie's world was spinning in confusion and, in the period between the birth of her sister and her own graduation in June of 1916, it seemed that the whole world had changed.

One index to the changing times was the graduation speech delivered by the school Principal who warned the children that they were graduating into,

"a troubled world and about how it would be up to them to build a new world after the war which was sure to come to America. He urged them on to higher education so that they would be better equipped for this world building." 26

During the vacation Francie takes a job making artificial flowers and discovers that life can be stupid, that,

"'This could be a whole life,' she thought. 'You work eight hours a day covering wires to earn money to buy food and to pay for a place to sleep so that you can keep living to come back to cover more wires.'" 27

The work at the flower factory was temporary and Francie's next employment is with the Model Press Clipping Company of Manhattan. She follows this by working a night shift as a teletypist while she attends college during the day. She falls in love with Ben Blake, a figure of the American Dream, who is studying to be a lawyer, who hopes to practice in the country, and who hopes eventually to move into politics:

"in that summer of 1917, the object of his ambitions, a vast midwestern state, lay dreaming beneath the hot prairie sun - lay dreaming among its great wheat fields ... unaware that the man who planned to occupy its White House as its youngest governor was, at that moment, a boy in Brooklyn." 28

26. Ibid, p.309.

27. Ibid, p.319. These flowers should be compared with the roses Francie receives from her dead father on graduation day. See pp.309-314.

28. Ibid, p.381.

He hoped, further, that Francie would be his bride.

Katie Nolan, who has accepted an offer of marriage from officer McShane, is also to be a bride. This ends the story on an optimistic note suggesting that the surviving members of the McShane and Nolan families have a favourable future ahead of them. Like the highly symbolic and apparently indestructable tree that grows regardless out of cracks in the cement and in cellar grates, they have survived and prospered despite their slum environment.²⁹ For this reason, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN has been dismissed by B.H.Gelfant as "gracious reading, for all that it may be trivial."³⁰

Betty Smith's novel is not, however, unimpressive. Indeed, its significance rests with the author's ability to represent, in realistic terms, both the successes and the failures within the American system. The tenement life it depicts is every bit as unattractive as that portrayed by Henry Roth, and it is equally damning. The Nolan's milieu is shabby and debilitating, but it is also improvable. Like the Schearls, for example, the Nolans and the people with whom they come into daily contact are penalized by racial, religious, linguistic, and financial obstacles that prevent them from being 'wholly American.' Unlike the Schearls, however, the Nolans were not raw immigrants. Accordingly, their access to the American system is more direct. This important factor is best illustrated by the comparison

29. Francie ends her story with the reference to the tree and says that "It lived! And nothing could destroy it." Ibid, p.430.

30. Blanche Houseman Gelfant, THE AMERICAN CITY NOVEL, (Norman, 1970), p.243.

between the two schools Francie attended,³¹ particularly the second school where the parents were sufficiently American to know about and demand their constitutional rights.³² In this sense, there is an element of fair play for the regulation of behaviour in an environment that is sordid and often incomprehensible. In order to balance the odds even further, Betty Smith has enough guile to repeat, in perceptively simple and appropriately urban terms, the ethic that patience and perseverance will yield their own profits: in Katie Nolan's scheme, endurance will amount to success. She says,

"Everything struggles to live. Look at that tree growing up there out of that grating. It gets no sun, and water only when it rains. It's growing out of sour earth. And it's strong because its hard struggle to live is making it strong. My children will be strong that way."³³

Survival, therefore, is translated into progress.³⁴

Nonetheless, the characters in A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN are as prone to degradation as are their counterparts in CALL IT SLEEP. They are surrounded by dirt, infamy, adversity, deception and brutality, but they are not predestined to failure or, for that matter to success. This factor makes A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN an important document of the 1920s and places Betty Smith in a prominent position

31. Smith, op.cit., pp.133-154.

32. The experiences of the immigrant Rommelys provides an interesting comparison. Ibid, pp.56-62 and pp.74-83.

33. Ibid, p.86.

34. This is qualified by the number of failures in the novel. The achievements of Katie, Francie, Neelie, and McShane are further dramatized when placed in relief against the misfortunes of Johnny Nolan, Henny Gaddis, Willie Flittman, Gimpy, and the McGarritys.

as a chronicler because it represents a departure from the overall and cumulative tradition of literary disenchantment in general, and, in particular, from the peculiar disillusionment associated with the decade.

As a reflection of social history, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN has the merit of substantiating the thesis that the emancipation of American women predated the 1920s.³⁵ In this sense, the representation of the Nolan and Rommely women seems to be deliberately understated, and it is all the more emphatic for being so. They were individualists,

"They conformed to nothing except what was essential to their being able to live in their world. They followed their own standards of living. They were part of no set social group." 36

As such, they established their own pace of change, and it passed almost unnoticed. When Katie discovered that Francie smoked cigarettes, for example, Francie expects to be berated. But Katie made no fuss. Instead, she told her daughter that,

"With so many soldiers dying in France and all, the world's not going to fall apart if you smoke a cigarette once in a while." 37

This outlook is repeated when Francie and Katie discuss,

35. James R. McGovern, "The American Woman's pre World War One Freedom in Manners and Morals," THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY, Volume LV. It will no doubt post date the 1970s.

36. Smith, op.cit., p.143.

37. Ibid, p.392.

mother to daughter, woman to woman, the possibility that Francie could have had a sexual encounter with Lee Rhynor. a young soldier on furlough. Katie acknowledges that she would have disapproved from a maternal perspective but that, as a woman, she could not deny the possibility that it might have been a beautiful experience.³⁸ Thus, the 'new' morality associated with the 1920s seems to have been an old and honest one, and this raises the important point that, for many Americans, perhaps for a majority of them, life passed without sudden or dramatic change. In this sense, the gin-swilling toe-tapping flapper may have been the least liberated and least representative of all figures.

The same honest inquiry found in the relationship between mother and daughter is repeated with disarming simplicity when Francie, on an outing with her father, calls in for questioning if not for ridicule, the heart of American Democracy. Determined to extend his children's knowledge of sociology, civics, and geography, Johnny Nolan took them to Bushwick Avenue, a wealthy neighbourhood where automobiles were as common as handsome horses and magnificent carriages. The lesson was as follows:

"'Anybody,' said Johnny, carried away by his personal dream of Democracy, 'can ride in one of those hansom cabs, provided,' he qualified, 'they got the money. So you can see what a free country we got here.'
'What's free about it if you have to pay?' asked Francie.

38. Ibid, p.407. The relationship between Francie and Lee is outlined pp.394-404.

'It's free in this way: If you have the money you're allowed to ride in them no matter who you are. In the old countries, certain people aren't free to ride in them, even if they have the money.'

'Wouldn't it be more of a free country,' persisted Francie, 'if we could ride in them free?'

'No.'

'Why?'

'Because that would be Socialism,' concluded Johnny triumphantly, 'and we don't want that over here.'

'Why?'

'Because we got Democracy and that's the best thing there is.' clinched Johnny." 39

The repository for this strand of American democracy was New York City which is described as "the greatest City in the world."⁴⁰

In A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, New York City functions as an active agent in the development of an urban style of life, and its influence is largely inspiring. From a rooftop in Williamsburg, Francie Nolan is wonder-struck by the lights and the majesty of Manhattan which was "pretty in the same way pictures of in-the-country are pretty." ⁴¹

Furthermore, at the everyday level, the city exerted an important influence upon the lives of its younger inhabitants. In particular, Smith points out that,

"The neighborhood stores are an important part of the city child's life. They are his contact with the supplies that keep life going; they hold that beauty that his soul longs for; they hold the unattainable that he can only dream and wish for." ⁴²

In turn, this re-enforces the individual's commitment to

39. Ibid, p.168.

40. Ibid, p.169.

41. Ibid, p.110.

42. Ibid, p.119.

the city as fact or as fantasy. Both are important to Francie Nolan who, on the eve of American entry into the First World War, is drunk with her own surroundings:

"She looked out over Brooklyn. The starlight half revealed, half concealed. She looked out over the flat roofs, uneven in height, broken once in a while by a slanting roof from a house left over from older times. The chimney pots on the roof ... and on some, the shadowing looming of pigeon cotes ... sometimes faintly heard, the sleepy cooing of pigeons ... the twin spires of the Church, remotely brooding over the dark tenements ... And at the end of their street, the great Bridge that threw itself like a sigh across the East River and was lost ... lost ... on the other shore. The dark East River beneath the Bridge, and far away, the misty-gray skyline of Manhattan, looking like a city cut from cardboard." 43

Like Henry Roth, therefore, Betty Smith is very much at home in her urban American environment, the fusion of which provides both authors with a legitimate and acceptable setting.⁴⁴

43. Ibid, p.358.

44. This factor is important because there is a tradition among American authors to regard America as an unsuitable literary setting. For further reference see Robert F. Stowell, PROBLEMS AND METHODOLOGY IN THE COMPILATION OF AN ATLAS FOR AMERICAN LITERATURE: HENRY THOREAU: A CASE STUDY, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Canterbury, (Christchurch, 1971).

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT GATSBY

In striking contrast to CALL IT SLEEP,¹ and A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN,² F.Scott Fitzgerald's THE GREAT GATSBY³ advances the paradoxical thesis that the hopelessness of the poor is not, perhaps, as hopeless as the hopelessness of the rich. Indeed, as the critic, John W.Bicknell, has stated, Fitzgerald,

"portrayed the beautiful and the rich as essentially damned and ... implied that the American Dream was, after all, little more than a thinly veiled nightmare." 4

It is all the more relevant, therefore, that Fitzgerald "pronounced a sentence of doom over a social order that imagined itself in full flower."⁵ As an exposition and as an exposé of the American Dream in the 1920s, therefore, Fitzgerald offered proof that poverty was not the only landscape of nightmare, thus suggesting that waste, desolation and futility, were as common to voices full of money, as they were to voices fully devoid of it.⁶ Just as Francie Nolan

1. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970).

2. Betty Smith A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, (New York, 1968).

3. F.Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973).

4. John W.Bicknell, "The Waste Land of F.Scott Fitzgerald," VIRGINIA QUARTERLY REVIEW, Volume XXX, (1954), p.556.

5. Ibid, p.557.

6. In THE GREAT GATSBY, the American Dream and the 1920s are closely associated. Statements like "the novel is not ... a tragic pastoral of the Jazz Age, but rather a criticism of the American dream," Robert F.Stallman, "Gatsby and the Hole in Time," MODERN FICTION STUDIES, Volume 1, Number 4, p.2, for example, can be misleading.

often appeared to be richer as a result of her poverty, characters from THE GREAT GATSBY, the Buchanans for example, frequently appear to be impoverished by their wealth.

At the outset of the novel, Nick Carraway deprecates the American Dream by suggesting some of the inequalities found in the American birthright, a condition that the 'gorgeously' hopeful Gatsby tries to exempt himself from. This very pursuit finally leads to Gatsby's 'downfall,' but it is immediately established that,

"Gatsby turned out all right in the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out Carraway's interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men." 7

Indeed, this is the motif of the novel: Gatsby is destroyed by his uncritical faith in his own fantasies and the dream that wealth was the way to the realization of love and life. In reality, however, he amassed a fortune in fraud and violence.

In establishing the milieu of his victim - one hesitates to call Gatsby a hero - Fitzgerald depicts the 'strangest communities' in New York, the twin Eggs of Long Island, where Gatsby has a huge and expensive mansion in the West that directly overlooks the 'white palaces' of

7. Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.8. It is relevant, therefore, that Walter Allen claims that Gatsby "has remained faithful to a dream and also to a belief, which is part of the dream, that he can conquer circumstances, rearrange them in accordance with his will.

In The Great Gatsby Scott Fitzgerald shows us the American Dream in its tragic aspect, in other words, as a dream incapable of realization precisely because it is a dream." Walter E. Allen, THE URGENT WEST: THE AMERICAN DREAM AND MODERN MAN, (New York, 1969), p.10.

fashionable East Egg, and the 'single green light' of the Buchanans' dock. Nick Carraway's visit to his cousin's reveals the Buchanans and their house-guest, Jordan Baker, to be rich, aimless, and insincere. The sheer opulence of their surroundings is then effectively counterpointed by the Eckleburg-dominated valley of ashes where Tom Buchanan has a mistress, the stout but sensuous Myrtle Wilson.⁸ Still setting the scene for Gatsby's entrance, Fitzgerald uses Nick to accompany Tom and Myrtle on one of their visits to Manhattan. In new surroundings, and with a change of clothing to match, Myrtle Wilson's presence is transformed.⁹ Even so, she is still little more than a plaything, and when she chants Daisy's name at him, Tom reveals just how different her world is from Daisy's and, for proof, he breaks her nose.¹⁰ From this example that wealth and social position can and do make for differences in

8. Daisy Buchanan is aware of this deception. George Wilson is not. The valley of ashes lies between Long Island and Manhattan. It is physically desolate.

9. Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.36. This short passage is a powerful precis of the rapidity and ease of the rags-to-riches transformation. This point has been completely overlooked by critics. It is important, however, because it provides an interesting point of comparison with the tempo and the quality of Gatsby's change.

10. In this example, setting and violence are correlated. Significantly, some critics regard New York City as a physical and factual entity as well as an enchanted place where conventional mores and morals do not apply. See John Henry Raleigh, "Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: Legendary Bases and Allegorical Significances," UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CITY REVIEW, Volume XXIII, Number 1, (June, 1957), pp.283-291, and Number 2, pp.55-58.

attitudes and behaviour, Nick further discovers from party guests that Daisy's Catholicism is the only factor preventing her from divorcing Tom.¹¹ Daisy is not, however, a Catholic, and Nick is shocked that the lie is so elaborate.

The reputation and reveries popularly associated with Jay Gatsby, who is at all times a figure of the American Dream, are equally elaborate if not as shocking. In fact, with an all but abandoned sense of philanthropy,¹² he taxies guests to and from his lavish and usually wild parties in Rolls-Royces, and while they are drawn from a variety of social backgrounds, the men and women who attended his fêtes converged in "a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths."¹³ Even so, Gatsby remains enigmatic, and there are numerous rumours about his past. Indeed, Nick Carraway is the only character to accept, simply, that a man of Gatsby's substance must have come from somewhere.¹⁴ In many senses, therefore, the mystery associated with Gatsby's background accentuates his predicament, that is,

11. Fitzgerald, op.cit., pp.39-40.

12. Nick's first description of Gatsby registers his generous smile and establishes that part of Gatsby's greatness in his ability to gratify. Ibid, p.54.

13. Ibid, p.85. Fitzgerald stresses the homogeneous atmosphere at Gatsby's parties. See, for example, p.51 and p.69.

14. Gatsby misleads Nick with a deceptive account of his past while they are driving towards Manhattan, ibid, pp.71-73. Eventually, Nick is entrusted with the true version. It is outlined between pp.104-107 and pp.154-159.

"the essence of the American dream whose tragedy Gatsby is enacting is that it lives in a past and a future that never existed, and is helpless in a present that does." 15

Indeed, the foundation of Gatsby's dream originated in a period distorted by war,¹⁶ and took its form from the thrilling but expensive and reckless Daisy Fay. Jordan Baker, who was a witness to the affair, narrates the story of the star-crossed lovers to Nick Carraway. In October of 1917, in the midst of their liaison, Gatsby was called away to war. It was rumoured that Daisy had wanted to go to New York to say good-bye to him but that her family had prevented her from doing so. She and Gatsby had agreed to wait for each other, but Daisy grew impatient that her life should be shaped immediately. It could have been shaped by any powerful force, and it is perhaps incidental that the force was Tom Buchanan, whom she married. Soon after their lavish wedding Daisy learned of Tom's philandering, gave birth to a daughter the next year, and then spent twelve months in France. After this, the Buchanans returned to Chicago where,

"They moved with a fast crowd, all of them young and rich and wild, but she came out with an absolutely perfect reputation." 17

15. Marius Bewley, THE ECCENTRIC DESIGN: FORM IN THE CLASSIC AMERICAN NOVEL, (London, 1959), p.283.

16. Gatsby is aware, for example, that he had been in Daisy's house by accident, that whatever his future, "He had been [In 1917] a penniless young man without a past, and at any moment the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders. So he made the most of his time. He took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously." Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.155.

The narration is returned to Nick who now understands the essence of Gatsby's American Dream, who realizes that Gatsby's life did have purpose, that he had acquired the mansion in West Egg in order to be across the bay from Daisy. Acting for Gatsby, Jordan asks Nick to invite Daisy over to his house in order that she may see Gatsby's mansion next door.¹⁸

When the meeting took place the possibilities in Gatsby's American Dream were unleashed. Initially, the hitherto lovers were embarrassed. When this passed, however, Gatsby "literally glowed,"¹⁹ and Daisy exuded "unexpected joy."²⁰ Resultingly, Gatsby re-examined the vision that had possessed him for so long,

"He hadn't ceased once looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real." 21

Finally, Daisy weeps at the very beauty of Gatsby's shirts. From this point onwards, the green light on the dock ceases to symbolise the seemingly impregnable gulf that divided

18. The story of the romance between Daisy and Gatsby is first outlined by Jordan Baker and then substantiated by Gatsby himself. Ibid, pp.81-84 and pp. 154-159.

19. Ibid, p.96.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid, p.98. Leslie Fiedler laments that "wealth is no longer innocent, America no longer innocent, and Daisy is the soul of both turned destructive and corrupt." Leslie A. Fiedler, LOVE AND DEATH IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL, (London, 1970), p.292.

Gatsby from his illusions. Indeed, Daisy's presence climaxes the amassed residue of Gatsby's dreams, and Nick Carraway wonders that,

"There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams - not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart." 22

and then suggests,

"I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be over-dreamed - that voice was a deathless song." 23

This quality underlies the self-inseminated character of Gatsby who, where beauty is concerned, is devoted to the vast, the vulgar, and the meretricious. Most of all, he is devoted to Daisy who considers West Egg déclassé, a regrettable extension of Broadway. As the dictator of his dreams, indeed as his very dream itself, Daisy demands changes in Gatsby's style of life: the lavish parties stop and, in order to prevent gossip, she has Gatsby's entire staff fired and a new one hired.

In many senses, therefore, Daisy is herself involved in the dream she personifies. The day that Nick and Gatsby lunch at the Buchanans', for example, is excessively hot and confused. Daisy and Jordan, the 'silver idols,' are exhausted and 'unable to move.' In particular, Daisy is

22. Fitzgerald, op.cit., pp.102-103.

23. Ibid, p.103.

enervated, restless, and almost desperate to get Gatsby to herself. Impetuously, she exchanges an injudiciously intimate glance with him. This folly is immediately detected by Tom who is shocked at the realization that his wife is actually in love with Gatsby. When Nick says soon after, that Daisy has an indiscreet voice, Gatsby replies, "Her voice is full of money."²⁴ It is therefore, the voice of the American Dream.

Unnerved by what he has observed, Tom Buchanan suggests that the party moves on to Manhattan, and it is decided that Tom, Jordan and Nick will ride in Gatsby's yellow car while Gatsby and Daisy travel in Tom's coupé. En route, Tom stops at the garage in the valley of ashes and learns that Wilson has discovered Myrtle's faithlessness, but does not know the identity of her lover. In an ironic effort to save the marriage, therefore, he asks Tom for money so that he and his wife can go west to make a fresh start. Within an hour, Tom's wife and mistress, hitherto secure and inviolate, were both slipping away.

After engaging the parlour of a suite at the Plaza Hotel, therefore, Buchanan then forces Gatsby into a confrontation designed to strip him of his dreams. As a result, Daisy admits that she loves Gatsby, but does not concede to his demand that she denies ever having loved Tom. Indeed, when she and Gatsby declare her intention to leave

24. Ibid, p.126. In this context, Marius Bewley contends that "the American Dream could only feed on material, and therefore exhaustible, possibilities." Bewley, op.cit., p.264.

Tom, it is sufficient for him to say that the flirtation was over, the dream lost:

"and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room." 25

The group returned to East Egg.

Daisy drove Gatsby's car back. On the way, she ran into and killed Myrtle Wilson.²⁶ She did not stop. Following this the Buchanans, in an ultimate indictment of the American Dream, allow Gatsby to take the blame. As a result, he is murdered by the deranged Wilson. Up until the time of his death, however, Gatsby maintained his faith in the American Dream which he regarded as "incorruptible."²⁷ Abused and taken for granted in life, Gatsby was shunned in death, and only a handful of mourners attended his funeral. Completely disillusioned by all that he has witnessed, Nick Carraway decides to return to the West, the birthplace of most characters in the novel. Before leaving, however, he takes a last look at the view from Gatsby's mansion and, watching the rising moon merge houses into the landscape, he is conscious of the virginal vision that greeted the first Dutch sailors as they looked out over,

25. Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.141.

26. Wilson had locked his wife up. When she freed herself she ran towards the yellow car which she thought was driven by Tom Buchanan.

27. Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.160.

"... a fresh green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this new continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." 28

However much the American Dream was a recurrent motif in American literature, its exposition in THE GREAT GATSBY offers what Marius Bewley has called the closest and most severe criticism it has ever had to withstand.²⁹ Significantly, this came at a time when the meaning of America was being questioned, and the setting of the 1920s is important, therefore, because, as Roger Pearson has stated, Gatsby's

"failure and destruction serve as a portent for the eclipse of the American Dream, and the passing away of an era." 30

In his novel of dreams, then, Fitzgerald faithfully reflected

28. Ibid, pp.187-188. The novel is thus part of the American theme, a point made in Charles Holmes' threnody that "Nostalgia and loss - of our innocence, of our closeness to the land, of our dreams - are the great emotions in American literature." Charles S. Holmes, "Fitzgerald: The American Theme," PACIFIC SPECTATOR, Volume VI, (1952). p.252. This point is further substantiated by R.L. Pearson, who asserts that the American Dream is a recurrent theme in American literature, dating back to some of the earliest colonial writings. For further reference see Roger L. Pearson, "Gatsby: False Prophet of the American Dream," ENGLISH JOURNAL, Volume LIX, (1970), pp.638-642.

29. Marius Bewley, "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America," SEWANNE REVIEW, Volume LXII, Number 2, (April/June, 1954), pp.223-246.

30. Pearson, op.cit., p.639. It is possible that this may be true of all American eras in that "The American dream stretched between a golden past and a golden future, is always betrayed by a desolate present." Marius Bewley, THE ECCENTRIC DESIGN, op.cit., p.282.

the social history of the decade without ever being obtrusive about it. His narrator, Nick Carraway, returned from the war restless, and the Buchanans are members of a smug elite who have seen everything and done everything, and who find everything terrible. In this sense, they are trapped in time, and their predicament is well expressed by Wright Morris who says that they were characterized by,

"the paralysis of will that grew out of the knowledge that the past was dead, and that the present had no future." 31

Indeed, as Tom Buchanan observed, America's civilization was in decline, and this could only be arrested by reactionary strategies,

"Civilization's going to pieces ... Have you read The Rise of the Coloured Empires ... it's a fine book ... The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be - will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things." 32

Buchanan is equally intolerant of the 'increased freedom' among American women, and he is especially critical of Jordan Baker and his own wife.³³ Fitzgerald, however, takes his women in his stride: Jazz, cigarettes, liquor, changing fashions, and changing hair styles are matters of neutral fact that pale in comparison to the raffish and colourful Gatsby, and which are all the more

31. Wright Morris, THE TERRITORY AHEAD, (New York. 1963), p.163. R.F.Stallman, op.cit., calls this experience "that void of the corrupted present cancelled out by the corrupted past." p.4.

32. Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.19.

33. Ibid, p.25 and pp.110-111, for examples.

believable because of their moderation. Indeed, in Gatsby's world nothing is unusual, and the city in which the action is set boasts an "inexhaustible variety of life."³⁴

Even though he confines himself mainly to the rich, Fitzgerald captures this variety in his close relationship with the urban environment, and his ease in describing, with sensitive poesy, the "white chasms"³⁵ of its streets. His abilities are displayed at their most striking, however, in a section devoted to the unique magic and magnetism of Manhattan. Using Carraway as his voice, Fitzgerald says,

"I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feeling of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others - poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner - young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life." 36

The city is alive. It is itself. It is its people.

34. Ibid, p.42.

35. Ibid, p.62.

36. Ibid, p.63.

CHAPTER V

MANHATTAN TRANSFER

Whereas CALL IT SLEEP,¹ A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN,² and THE GREAT GATSBY,³ are concerned with extremes in American society, particularly those of wealth and poverty, for example, John Dos Passos' MANHATTAN TRANSFER,⁴ is a thorough and thought-provoking account of the tremendous breadth found in the American Dream and in American society during the approximate period of the 1920s. This very perspective is shared by one of the foremost critics of the decade, Joseph Warren Beach, who says,

"Dos Passos favours the middle reaches of society where the great masses live, and, morally considered, from those levels far below ideal beauty of character, and considerably above the merely mean and vile ... They are numerous and diversified ... [giving an] impression of a section cut straight across the social organism of New York City." 5

Indeed, the breadth and detail of Dos Passos' representation, historically accurate and artistically attractive, does much to reduce the established critical tradition that F.Scott Fitzgerald was the decade's definitive literary

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1. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970).
 2. Betty Smith, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, (New York, 1968).
 3. F.Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973).
 4. John Dos Passos, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, (Boston, Fourth Printing, Sentry Edition, no date given).
 5. Joseph Warren Beach, "Discontinuity: John Dos Passos," THE TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVEL: STUDIES IN TECHNIQUE, (New York, 1932), pp.439-440.

chronicler.⁶ John Dos Passos faithfully recorded his times, an achievement that Milton Rugoff attributes to the success of his

"attempts to integrate the individual with the period, to leave us everywhere conscious of how the age had molded the man, made him one of its peculiar products." 7

Indeed, the 1920s was a consciously urban age in which Dos Passos posits that the city itself was a vital determinant influencing social behaviour. In this sense, the genius of the novel is its radical implication that the survival of individuals despite the city, in the final assessment, was secondary to the survival of the city in spite of its inhabitants.⁸

The American Dream is as much the subject of MANHATTAN TRANSFER as is the city, and it, the American Dream, that is, brings order to chaos by providing the novel with its consecutive form. In the early stages of the novel, for example, Ed Thatcher resolves that his baby daughter will never know material need, and that she will flourish instead. He is joined by Marcus A. Zucher, who he has never met before and never meets afterwards, and who

6. See William R. Irwin, "Dos Passos and Fitzgerald as Reviewers of the American Social Scene," DIE NEUEREN SPRACHEN, (1960), pp.417-428.

7. Milton Rugoff, "Dos Passos: Novelist of Our Time," SEWANNE REVIEW, Volume XLIX, (1941), p.468.

8. Fire, for example, is an essential symbol in the novel, and there are references, throughout, to the destructive exploits of a pyromaniac. This claim is substantiated by Eugene Arden, "Manhattan Transfer: An Experiment in Technique," UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CITY REVIEW, Volume XXII, (Winter, 1955), p.157.

has only just become a young father himself. At the turn of the century both men are imbued with hope, and Zucker, drunk with joy, outlines his own earnest aspiration,

"And I have the hops in mein heart that ven my poy drinks to his poy, it will be in champagne vine. Ach, that is how things go in this great city." 9

In the beginning of the novel, therefore, future and progress are depicted synonomously, and this is as true at the individual level as it is for society at large: in itself, change can be a positive force.

It can also be powerful and lucrative, a point emphasized in the vignette involving a nameless real-estate agent who urges Mr. Perry, a character mentioned only once, to join the Astor and Vanderbilt traditions of gaining wealth by investing money in land, in this case in Queens which would eventually be, like Manhattan, at the heart of New York City: "telephones, electricity, steel bridges, horseless vehicles - they are all leading somewhere."¹⁰ Then, in an otherwise unrelated incident, the continuity of the novel is expressed through the Dream theme as Congo, a penniless immigrant who eventually becomes very rich, tells Emile Loustec of his own American Dream,

"I want to get somewhere in the world, that's

9. Dos Passos, op.cit., p.9. Gene Ruoff warns in this context that social mobility, as a theme, is not new, and is not solely American. See G.W.Ruoff, "Social Mobility and the Artist in Manhattan Transfer and The Music of Time," WISCONSIN STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE, Volume V, (Winter/Spring, 1964), pp.64-76.

10. Dos Passos, op.cit., p.15. See also, pp.40-42.

what I mean. Europe's rotten and stinking. In America a fellow can get ahead. Birth dont matter. Education dont matter. It's all getting ahead." 11

These desires are translated at yet another level as the nouveau riche and emasculating Bertha Olafson bullies her husband into renting an apartment on Riverside Drive as an expression of their wealth and of their position in society.

In turn, Bertha's aspirations provide a connecting link to the almost macabre tale of Gus McNiel, a milkman who detests the city and who has resolved to leave it. His plans are disrupted when he is involved in an accident, however, and his serious injuries are treated as a streak of good luck. Indeed, when he learns he is to receive \$12,500 in damages, he wants to run out and be run over again.¹²

This thirst for money is reiterated in an incident involving Ed and Ellen Thatcher during a visit to the Battery. Ellen is always dressed in something new and admits, with childlike but ominous candour, that she would love her father more if only he had more money.¹³

11. Ibid, p.21. Loustec is not unaware that "in France you are paid badly to live well; here you are paid well to live badly." Ibid, p.36.

12. Ibid, p.72. See also, pp.45-57.

13. Ibid, pp.62-64.

In contrast, they meet with an old man who longs for his native country because American society was only for the young and strong, and not for the aged or infirm.¹⁴

At the end of the First Section of MANHATTAN TRANSFER, therefore, Dos Passos has established an impression that the characters he depicts are more often agents than they are victims.¹⁵ The emphasis, as Ed Thatcher outlines to his somewhat headstrong daughter, is on "con-struction and not de-struction."¹⁶ Indeed, with few exceptions, the hapless Joe Harland and Bud Korpenning, for examples,¹⁷ the accent of the novel appears to be dedicated to the proposition that, as Emile Loustec states it,

"People are all the same. It's only that some people get ahead and others dont ... That's why I came to New York." 18

14. Ibid, p.63. An incident involving an elderly lady and Bud Korpenning illustrates that the old can survive only if they are crafty enough. Ibid. p.64.

15. This runs counter to a claim made by Alfred Kazin that Dos Passos' characters are all simply doomed because the cards are stacked coldly against them. See Alfred Kazin, "American Naturalism: Reflections from Another Era," NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY, Volume XX, (1957), pp.52-53, and p.56. Kazin concedes, however, that Dos Passos has always sided with the individual, no matter what class he comes from. Ibid, p.60.

16. Dos Passos, op.cit., p.18.

17. Bud Korpenning's tale is cleverly stated. He appears to be an innocent country boy unsuited to the guile of city life. In fact, he is in New York City expressly to be as a needle in a haystack, having murdered his brutal father. Ibid, see pp.5,42,64-65,122-123, and 125.

18. Ibid, p.37.

The Second Section of MANHATTAN TRANSFER deals with this very theme, with success and failure in general, and, in particular, with the failure of success and the success of failure. Elaine Thatcher Oglethorpe, for example, has already made the change at Manhattan Transfer only to discover that her husband, an established actor, is also a homosexual. More than anything else, she wants to be a success, and her ambition to get on in the world is so far advanced that Ruth Prynne, one of her associates, says of her,

"Why that girl'd marry a trolley car if she thought she could get anything by it." 19

Stressing this as the principal trait of her character and the overall tone of the novel, an unsympathetic E.D. Lowry maintains that Elaine is of the city as well as its symbol. She represents,

"the ruthlessness, the readiness to subordinate human values to the exigencies of 'success,' which characterize the city as a whole." 20

Indeed, still married to Oglethorpe, she manages to capture the admiration, if not the devotion, of George Baldwin, Jimmy Herf, Stan Emery, and Harry Goldweiser.

Goldweiser's case illustrates the issue at hand. A theatrical entrepreneur, he has amassed a fortune by

19. Ibid, p.156.

20. E.D. Lowry, "Manhattan Transfer: Dos Passos' Wasteland," UNIVERSITY REVIEW, (Kansas City, Mo.) Volume XXX, (October, 1963), p.49.

thrift and hard work. The only reason that success pleases him is that he can offer its benefits to Elaine. He tells her that,

"All these ideals and beautiful things pushed down into myself when I was making my way in a man's world were like planting seed and you're the flower." 21

In turn, Elaine confronts herself with the fact that her life and her career are built on dishonesty, and she says,

"I hate it: it's all false. Sometimes I want to run down to the foots and tell the audience, go home you damn fools. This is a rotten show and a lot of false acting and you ought to know it." 22

It is all the more relevant, therefore, that George Baldwin shouts back at her, "You're no better than a common prostitute." 23

The ultimate expression of condemnation occurs in Elaine's relationship with Stan Emery, a rich young man who loved her and who had a prolonged affair with her. The fruit of the relationship is, however, barren. Rejected by her, he sets out on a drunken spree from New York to Niagara Falls, and marries a young girl he picked up along the way. After his return to New York City he is burned to death in a fire, and pregnant to him, Elaine has an untidy but quick abortion.²⁴

21. Dos Passos, op.cit., p.203.

22. Ibid, p.212.

23. Ibid, p.229.

24. Ibid, pp.267-268.

Emery stands against everything Elaine stood for. With the freedom of the rich, therefore, he can afford to ask one of the leading questions in the novel,

"Why the hell does everyone want to succeed. I'd like to meet someone who wanted to fail. That's the only sublime thing." 25

In this sense, Emery admires Jimmy Herf who, because he has no ambitions, is the most sensible person in New York City. As Elaine's childhood and adult counterpart, Herf is encouraged to follow the conventional upwards path of thrift and acumen, but he wants no part of it. Indeed, he is not without ambition, but he has an overriding desire to get out of New York, the cesspool city, where he is rotting and losing the best part of his life.²⁶

It is a surprise, therefore, that the Third Section of the novel opens, at war's end, with the return from abroad of Jimmy, his wife, Elaine (now named Helena), and their infant son, Martin.²⁷ Prohibition had been introduced during their absence, but they are immediately reassured that "the difficulty under prohibition is keeping sober."²⁸ Indeed, society and flux had become synonyms, and the postwar predicament is outlined as follows,

"... the country is going through a

25. Ibid, p.175. This dramatizes the fortunes and the misfortunes of Joe Harland.

26. Ibid, p.177.

27. The boy is named after Martin Schiff who despairingly stated, "Oh we none of us know what we want .. That's why we're such a peewee generation. Ibid, p.360.

28. Ibid, p.279.

dangerous period of reconstruction ... the confusion attendant on the winding up of a great conflict ... the bankruptcy of a continent ... bolshevism and subversive doctrines rife ... America ... is in the position of taking over the receivership of the world. The great principles of democracy, of that commercial freedom upon which our whole civilization depends are more than ever at stake. Now as at no other time we need men of established ability and unblemished integrity in public office." 29

In reality, however, the politics in MANHATTAN TRANSFER are entrusted to Gus McNiel and George Baldwin, both of whom have tainted backgrounds.³⁰

Helena's marriage to Jimmy Herf does not last long, and she soon agrees to divorce him. Indeed, their relationship seems to have deteriorated apace with her ever-increasing instinct for self-preservation, a process that ultimately leaves her dehumanized, frigid, and unresponsive. This point is highlighted during an incident that occurs after she has agreed to marry George Baldwin. Realizing that she is becoming hard-looking, and fearing a future of stoutness, menopause and face-lifts, she opts for a new wardrobe from Madam Soubrine's.³¹ While

29. Ibid, pp.287-288. The outcome of these fears was the deportation to Russia of the 'Reds'. Ibid, pp.289-290.

30. Ibid, see pp.312-314, 326-327, and 332-333.

31. Ibid, p.397. This is qualified in that Patrick Morrow argues that, "The future has been cancelled in Manhattan Transfer, along with all the old beliefs." Patrick Morrow, "The Dada World of Manhattan Transfer," RESEARCH STUDIES OF WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY, Volume XXXVIII, (1970), p.258. Also, Blanche H. Gelfant claims that, in MANHATTAN TRANSFER, "the underlying historical viewpoint was always retrospective, implying the comparison of the present with an idealized past." B.H. Gelfant, "The Search For Identity in the Novels of John Dos Passos," PAPERS OF THE MIDWEST MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION, Volume LXXVI, (March, 1961), p.148.

the garments are being exhibited, however, a model's tulle dress catches fire and she is hideously burned. Although she has been a witness to the drama, Helena dismisses it as a bit of everyday bad luck that is of no concern to her. She realizes in consequence that she has lost something, but she does not know what it is.³² In this sense, E.D.Lowry has no compassion for her, and he says,

"In the final stages of the novel, after Ellen has irrevocably committed herself to the arid ways of the city, she has the vague feeling that she has left something behind in the taxi, but she knows it could not have been her umbrella, for no life-giving rain - the sort conspicuously absent in Manhattan Transfer - will ever freshen her parched existence." 33

In contrast, Jimmy Herf's outcome evokes sympathy.³⁴ Estranged from his wife and jobless, he was well aware of his predicament:

"His drunkenness ebbed away leaving him icily sober. In the empty chamber of his brain a doublefaced word clinked like a coin: Success Failure, Success Failure."

With this pattern beating in his head, Herf has his youth

32. For further details of this incident see Dos Passos, op.cit., pp.395-400.

33. Lowry, op.cit., pp.51-52.

34. This claim is contradicted by Bernard DeVoto who erringly argues that the characters in MANHATTAN TRANSFER are not sufficiently alive to engage any sympathy. See Bernard DeVoto, "John Dos Passos: Anatomist of Our Times," SATURDAY REVIEW, Volume XIV, (August 8, 1936), pp.3-4. and pp. 12-13.

35. Dos Passos, op.cit., p.303.

stripped away from him as his life was turned upside down, and he was suspended like "a fly walking on the ceiling of a topsy-turvy city."³⁶ In dream, and in reality, there was a void dividing failure from success,³⁷ and this is muted only when Jimmy leaves the city:

"Carefully, he spends his last quarter on breakfast. That leaves him three cents for good luck, or bad for that matter." 38

Herf thus achieves the ultimate moderation.

Although its convoluted technique often operates to the detriment of the novel, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, with its panoramic view of the social masses and its broad span dating from the late 1890s to the mid 1920s,³⁹ is as critical an indictment of the American Dream in the first decades of this century as are CALL IT SLEEP, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, and THE GREAT GATSBY, treated individually or together. Indeed, paying tribute to Dos Passos' mastery, E.D.Lowry maintains that,

"Conceived as an indigenous expression of the modern age and a work which could help man master a runaway urban-industrial society, Manhattan Transfer stands as one of the most serious and ambitious literary achievements of the twenties." 40

The novel is, therefore, an important statement of social

36. Ibid, p.351.

37. Ibid, see p.386.

38. Ibid, p.404. In this sense, he qualifies for heroic status in that, "A male character in American literature may be a hero in almost any circumstances: all he must do is struggle, see things as they really are, and benefit from his knowledge." Marston LaFrance, PATTERNS OF COMMITMENT IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, (Canada, 1967), p.17.

39. For substantiation and further details of the time sequence see Arden, op.cit., p.155, and Beach, op.cit., p.437.

40. E.D.Lowry, "The Lively Art of Manhattan Transfer," PAPERS OF THE MIDWEST MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION, Volume LXXXIV, (1969), p.1638.

history, and there is little doubt that Dos Passos accurately, and extensively, depicted the social issues of his times.⁴¹

Clarifying the popular impression of the 1920s in the same way that the novelists already studied have done, Dos Passos records, for example, that intolerance was already a toxic influence in American society. This point is highlighted in the early stages of the novel when the overpowering Bertha Olafson gives the land agent a false address because, as she explained to her husband,

"I couldn't tell him we lived in the Bronx could I? He'd have thought we were Jews and wouldn't have rented us the apartment." 42

George Baldwin's impression of the West Side, which, in his opinion, was inhabited by "low Irish and foreigners, the scum of the universe,"⁴³ is an added example of this very question. Indeed, as another character later observes, the 'New World' had changed since the "Ark"⁴⁴ first landed, and it was now dominated by Kikes and the degenerate Irish, as a result, that is, of America's overly indulgent immigration policies.⁴⁵ The important factor is, of course,

41. This point is developed at greater length by James S. Smith, "The Novelist of Discomfort: A Reconsideration of John Dos Passos," COLLEGE ENGLISH, Volume XIX, (1958), pp.332-338.

42. Dos Passos, op.cit., p.42.

43. Ibid, p.51.

44. Ibid, p.101.

45. This raises the significant point that, until the 1920s at least, America distinguished itself with one of the most liberal immigration policies in history.

that these sentiments predated the 1920s, and that future outbursts, far from being spontaneous, were often stirred up by newspapermen in search of fresh copy.⁴⁶

In keeping with the examples established by Roth, Smith and Fitzgerald, Dos Passos' delivery is low pitched as he portrays social attitudes in general, and the behaviour of American women in particular. Operating from the panoramic perspective that Eugene Arden terms "varied yet typical experience."⁴⁷ the world of John Dos Passos is characterized by "normal chaos,"⁴⁸ and this is as true of the 1890s as it is of the 1920s. In outlining the traits in human nature that regulate a social order, therefore, Dos Passos does not resort to sudden or dramatic change, but emphasizes, instead, a reasonably constant equilibrium that Joseph Warren Beach suggests is,

"conceived as an organism in which the individuals are important primarily as functions of one another and of the whole." 49

In this larger perspective, then, there is nothing unusual or alarming in the promiscuity of Fifi Waters or Nevada Smith, and, at the end of the novel, Ellen Thatcher is only as free in her behaviour as she was when a child. It is important, therefore, that these factors tend to

46. See, for example, Dos Passos, op.cit., pp.222-223.

47. Arden, op.cit., p.153.

48. Ibid, p.157.

49. Beach, op.cit., p.447.

support an increasingly evident pattern that the social history of the 1920s does not appear to have had an exact literary reflection, and this interesting trend may well modify or extend even the most recent critical appraisals of the decade.

MANHATTAN TRANSFER does verify, however, the vitally urban nature of the 1920s, even to the extent that the full circle has been completed, and New York City has itself emerged as the real protagonist in the novel.⁵⁰ In this sense, Dos Passos achieved what the usually reserved critic, Bernard DeVoto, describes as,

"a brilliant evocation of the Metropolis, of colour and sound and movement ... its patterns shift expertly between chaos and implied design." 51

In short, Dos Passos bridges the gap between the city described and the city perceived, and while it is tempting to dwell upon the intimate relationship now solidly established between the American Dream, the 1920s, and New York City, suffice it to say until a later chapter that, timeless, MANHATTAN TRANSFER is without boundaries. It is all the more a reflection of Dos Passos' craftmanship,

50. This claim is supported by Arden, op.cit., p.153, and by Blanche Houseman Gelfant in THE AMERICAN CITY NOVEL, (Norman, 1970).

51. DeVoto, op.cit., p.4.

therefore, that an unidentified earthquake-insurance salesman is permitted to warn,

"Do you know how long God took to destroy the tower of Babel, folks? Seven minutes. Do you know how long the Lord God took to destroy Babylon and Nineveh? Seven minutes. There's more wickedness in one block of New York City than there was in a square mile in Nineveh, and how long do you think the Lord God of Sabboath will take to destroy New York City an Brooklyn an the Bronx? Seven seconds." 52

52. Dos Passos, op.cit., pp.380-381.

CHAPTER VI

BUTTERFIELD 8

John O'Hara's popular novel, BUTTERFIELD 8,¹ is at once similar to and different from the novels studied to this point. Although her portrait is essentially that of an adult and her background is largely affluent, Gloria Wandrous is exposed in her childhood and adolescence to many of the elements that shaped the lives of David Schearl in CALL IT SLEEP,² and Francie Nolan in A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN.³ In addition, with neither the established social prestige of the Buchanans nor the tremendous wealth of the man who gives his name to the title of the novel, Gloria might nonetheless have been plucked out of any of the lavish parties that punctuate THE GREAT GATSBY,⁴ and she could easily have been drawn from the middle reaches of MANHATTAN TRANSFER.⁵ In the realm of social history, however, BUTTERFIELD 8 is not as much an unreliable representation of American society and the American Dream in the 1920s as it is a different one.

1. John O'Hara, BUTTERFIELD 8, (New York, 1969).

2. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970).

3. Betty Smith, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, (New York, 1968). This point is developed at greater length in W. Tasker Witham, THE ADOLESCENT IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL, 1920-1960, (New York, 1964).

4. F. Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973).

5. John Dos Passos, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, (Boston, Fourth Printing, Sentry Edition, no date given).

Indeed, with Gloria as his central symbol for aspiration despoiled, O'Hara advances a distinctive and largely legitimate interpretation that is valuable to any understanding of the period. In essence, it is a statement of excess.

It would be easy, therefore, to misinterpret O'Hara's abilities as an author by dwelling upon the more sensational aspects of life which appear to preoccupy BUTTERFIELD 8. At the beginning of the novel, for example, the promiscuous Gloria Wandrous wakes up in an unfamiliar apartment. It is patent that she has spent the night with an unknown man, and that there is nothing exceptional in her having done so. Her first concern is not, therefore, that he could have relayed venereal disease to her - indeed, the reverse is more likely - but that she should sterilize his toothbrush before using it. Evidently, she is not bound by 'conventional' morality. In this sense, it would be almost automatic that she be cast in the peculiarly 'modern' and 'liberated' mould said to have distinguished the women of her time. This very association is, however, exactly what O'Hara strives to prevent.

Indeed, the subtlety of the novel rests with O'Hara's uncompromising refusal to allow Gloria either

to be shaped by the decade or to typify it.⁶ She was not a flapper, and although much was said of her, little of it was informed. After her death in 1931, for example, newspaper editorials described her as a representative of modern youth, but O'Hara highlights this incidence as one of the major distortions of the decade when he says,

"There can be no symbol of modern youth any more than there can be a symbol of modern middle age, and anyway symbol is a misnomer. The John Held Jr. caricatures of the 'flapper' of the 1920s, or the girls and young men whom Scott Fitzgerald made self-conscious were not symbols of the youth of that time." 7

Even with this caution in mind, however, it is proper and legitimate to argue that Gloria represented a force that was beyond mere historical fact. Instead, she stood for the bankruptcy of American society and the American Dream, past, present, and future.

The important factor is, therefore, that Gloria is at all times denied access to true possibility. She has a history of doom. At the age of eleven, for example, she is sexually molested by Major Boam, a man old enough

6. Gloria's behaviour is determined by factors beyond the 1920s, a point supported by the statement that, "in John O'Hara's Butterfield 8, Gloria's wealthy widowed mother and her devoted bachelor uncle are unable to keep the lovely girl from being sexually molested at eleven years of age by a middle-aged friend of the family in Pittsburgh, or from being seduced in a New York hotel at fifteen by a respectable-looking school principal, or from becoming a heavy drinker at eighteen and a casual bed-companion of New York college boys at nineteen." Witham, op.cit., p.203.

7. O'Hara, op.cit., p.99.

to be her father. The experience is shocking, and she has no one with whom she can share the sordid secret. Indeed, no one believes her when, after a year, she finally has the courage to say what had happened.

Her situation deteriorates further when the family moves to New York City. It was suggested that Gloria go west to California, but her uncle, William Vandamm, opposes the scheme,

"whatever chance there was of Gloria's being sent to California or anywhere west of the Hudson disappeared when two crimes of violence occurred within a week of each other, solidifying for all time Vandamm's inherent prejudice against the West. One crime was the Leopold-Loeb affair, which was too close a reminder of what had happened to Gloria; and the other was a suicide-pact of a woman and the doctor Vandamm had known long ago." 8

Three years later, Gloria was sent to school in New England. Travelling to and from New York City, she met with and was seduced by Doctor Reddington, known at his New York City hotel as a respectable school teacher, who in fact gave Gloria her taste for, if not her addiction to sex, alcohol, and drugs. Indeed, she is expelled from the school when a bottle of gin was found in her room, and liquor became an important part of her life:

"the thing that about that time became and continued for two or three years to be the most important was drinking. She became one of the world's heaviest drinkers between 1927 and 1930, when the world saw some pretty heavy drinking." 9

8. Ibid, p.115. O'Hara tends to cite the names of people who, for one reason or another, were prominent during the 1920s. See, for examples, references to Sacco and Vanzetti (p.36), Snyder and Gray (p.63), Al Smith (p.150), Coolidge (p. 165), Owen D. Young (p.188), and LaGuardia (p.234).

9. Ibid, p.120.

In addition,

"There was no reason to go on the wagon
... It was understood and agreed that the
big thing in life was liquor." 10

In the Winter of 1929-1930, Gloria became pregnant and had an abortion.¹¹ She became very drunk that night which was the first night she met and slept with Liggett, the incident that opens the novel. Indeed, the relationship with Liggett further stacks the cards against Gloria and causes her to grieve for self-respect in that she knows she is too 'experienced and easy.'¹² When Liggett declares his intention to set her up in an apartment of her own she tells him that she is not for sale. She is, however, attracted to him, because she could tell him about the filth of New York City,¹³ and because he wanted her the way she wants to be wanted: plainly, without fancy variations.

The hopelessness of Gloria's plight, her very exclusion from common possibility, is highlighted when she decides to give Liggett up. She intuitively knows that she will never know the security, if also the stultification, of marriage and motherhood. This point is emphasized in a vignette when Ann Paul tells Gloria of

10. Ibid, p.121.

11. Ibid, p.123. O'Hara adds that "Three abortions and all the things she had done not to have children probably had a very bad effect." Ibid, p.232.

12. Ibid, p.148. Note, in contrast, that her family is so proper that they will not allow her to smoke cigarettes. Ibid, p.48.

13. It would have been interesting had O'Hara shared Gloria's perspective of New York City with his readers, and not solely with Liggett.

her engagement to Bill Henderson,¹⁴ and with a description of a bitch and her puppies.¹⁵

The ultimate enslavement is, therefore, that Gloria can not free herself from longing for Liggett, the only person she wanted to be with:

"Here, with the bright sun on Fifth Avenue, she was thinking that the only thing she wanted was to be with Liggett, lying in bed or on the floor or anywhere with him, drunk as hell, taking dope, doing anything he wanted, not caring about the time of day or the day of the week and not thinking whether it was going to end." 16

Indeed, with the examples of Ann Paul and the bitch ringing in her head, and with her desire for Liggett dragging at her heart, she undergoes a crisis of her soul and of her circumstances. She wanted only to be like other women, not a marked woman at odds with the rest of the world. She is particularly envious of the Catholics and the Jews, the 'Broadway people' who still had good times,

"Gloria had at this point changed her classification from Catholic to Irish. The people who seemed to have the best time, at least so far as she had observed, were the Irish Catholics who didn't go to Church. Some of them would confess once a year and then they could start all over again ... She decided she wanted to go to a Catholic Church and confess." 17

14. Ibid, p.224.

15. Ibid, pp.229-232. The bitch has the qualities Gloria lacks. It can hold its head high and be friendly without being familiar of wanton, and it was protective.

16. Ibid, p.236.

17. Ibid, p.240.

But Rome was not her world. New York City was.

"Rome didn't have electric light and champagne and the telephone, thirty-story apartment houses and the view of New York at night, saxophones and pianos." 18

Desperate, she decides to go away, to leave that night for Massachusetts on the City of Essex, a boat built in the 1870s for the 1870s.¹⁹ Travelling under the name of Walter Little, Liggett follows Gloria on board, and she is both surprised and angry to find him there. He tells her that he loves her, however, and that he is all finished with Emily, his wife.²⁰ Liggett then proposes marriage, and she accepts. He wants her immediately, in his cabin. It is an awful room. Liggett promises that it will never be like this again, and Gloria resolves that it will never be like this at all.²¹

When she goes up on deck, therefore, Liggett follows her in order to apologise for treating her like a common tart. She is on the top deck, which is out of bounds to passengers. She runs towards him, stops, and looks around. Liggett turns to go, and as she falls overboard, he hears a scream and looks down to,

"the water just in time to see Gloria being sucked in by the side wheel. Then

18. Ibid, p.241.

19. Ibid, p.243. Gloria has nothing to fall back upon. She is radically estranged from the past, and is in fact disembodied by the relic of an older age.

20. Ibid, pp.258-259. Gloria adds home-breaking to her sins.

21. Ibid, pp.261-262.

the boat stopped.

'There was nothing I could do,' said
Liggett to nobody." 22

Gloria has been shredded by the boat's wheel and it is taken for granted that she committed suicide. She is, therefore, cheated in both life and death.

The hollowness of human nature and the society of the times is stated with added impact when Liggett, because of his assumed name, escapes detection, and returns to New York City. His inheritance from Gloria is that he now has a secret that was too big for him to share, that, to all intents and purposes, he was a murderer. He quickly rid himself of this feeling, however, simply because he was not of the type involved.²³ When the New York papers state that Gloria was identified only by her clothing, liggett is reminded of the mink coat she had taken from his apartment the first night, when he tore the clothes from her. He knows that she was friendly with Eddie Brunner and, in an ultimate indictment of prevailing values, he attempts to regain the coat. Brunner promises that the coat will be returned and claims that it was exactly the Liggetts of Gloria's world who were responsible for her death.

This point is given further emphasis in the final chapter of the novel which deals with Doctor Reddington's fear that his association with Gloria will be discovered

22. Ibid, pp.263-264.

23. As a rich Wasp, Weston Leggitt can avoid categorization. Note, however, that Jimmy Malloy and his brother, Irish, Catholic, and less well-to-do, are unable to avoid being stereotyped as gangsters. Ibid, p.59.

in the wake of her death. It is not detected and, like Liggett, he could then rest in the comfortable hypocrisy of his respectability. In this sense, Gloria Wandrous represents a defunct and 'innocent' strand of honesty that puts her in the same stable as Jay Gatsby and distinguishes her from the sterility of their contemporaries and their surroundings.

O'Hara's historical perspective is, therefore, largely pessimistic. It is also reliable. Indeed, the motif of aspiration despoiled helps to reconstruct traditional conceptualizations of the 1920s, and it points to the value of allowing literary spokesmen to function as interpreters of social history. In this sense, O'Hara brings new light to the role of sex and alcohol during the decade, both of which play a major part in the denouement of BUTTERFIELD 8.

Apart from the examples provided by the generous Gloria, most of O'Hara's women, Emily Liggett excepted, demonstrate a reasonably 'free' attitude towards sex. This is both a continuation of and a departure from 'orthodox' standards. Disillusioned with her husband, for example, Nancy Farley makes the somewhat radical decision to have an affair herself, with the actor, John Watterson. Her rationalization is, on the basis of the French quip, that,

"you can walk in the Bois without buying it. (It sounded better than the American: why keep a cow when milk is so cheap?)." 24

In turn, Isabel Stannard is provocative and delights in leading men on. Additionally, when Ann Paul visits Gloria and tells her she is engaged to Bill Henderson, she also confides the 'alarming' information that they had had a premarital affair. Ann's mother had warned her that men lost their respect for girls who slept with them too readily, but Ann knows only that matters must have changed drastically since her mother was their age.²⁵ It is significant, therefore, that Jimmy Malloy maintains that part of this change has been concocted because the newspapers and cigarette companies, for example, had been paying women to smoke on Fifth Avenue in order to popularize street smoking for women.²⁶

Gloria Wandrous and Weston Liggett are frequent patrons of speakeasies which change with the years. At the beginning of Prohibition, for example, they had served

24. Ibid, p.157. Even from the perspective of 1931, there is little mention of the widespread disillusionment said to have accompanied the 1920s. See, for example, Nancy Farley's reaction to bearing a stillborn child (Ibid, p.17), and William Vandamm on the prospects of recovering from the Depression (Ibid, p.188). Also note that Nancy Farley's sex education was sheltered. She learned most of what she knew from school friends, and from the propaganda pamphlets issued during World War One. They detailed the sexual atrocities Germans were said to have performed upon virgins, nuns, priests, and old women. Ibid, p.17.

25. The attitude of men towards women is implicit in Liggett's discovery, after 1929, that the social circles he moved in had a mortality rate for marriages that was close to one hundred percent, that many men, broken by the events of 1929 and deprived of the main stock of their worldly goods, came back to a single, last item: their wives. Ibid, pp.29-30.

26. Ibid, pp.40-41.

bad liquor in drab surroundings. Towards the end of the decade, however, they had become elegant and elaborate, and they symbolized the failure of an experiment.²⁷ The popular image of speakeasies was also far from factual, a point made when Jimmy Malloy takes Isabel Stannard to an establishment where Chicago gangsters were rumoured to congregate when they were in New York City,

"Except for the number and variety of bottles, and the cleanliness of the bar, it was just like any number (up to 20,000) of speakeasies near to and far from Times Square." 28

Indeed, Isabel is disappointed that the customers fail to conform to Warner Brothers' representations of speakeasy patrons. Instead, they were more like 'decent swells' who really belonged in Country Clubs. This point is further dramatized when Jimmy tells Isabel that he is a Catholic, an off-the-peg product who wears Brooks' clothes. Even though he could make legitimate claim to be a Son of the Revolution, however, Jimmy states that he is,

"pretty God damn American, and therefore my brothers and sisters are, and yet we're not Americans. We're Micks, we're non-assimilable, we Micks." 29

When Isabel objects to his behaviour and rebukes Jimmy

27. Ibid, p.132.

28. Ibid, p.57.

29. Ibid, p.59.

for humiliating her in public, he refers to one of the decade's most celebrated and publicised scandals as proof that she does not know the meaning of the word,

"Humiliated in public. What about the man that Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray knocked off? I'd say he was humiliated in public, plenty. Every newspaper in the country carried his name for days, column after column of humiliation, all kinds of humiliation. And yet you don't even remember his name. Humiliation my eye." 30

In this context, and in the context of social history, O'Hara's power is his ability to make the most of shrewd reversals. When Coolidge declares that the passing of the 'old' generation marked the end of an era, for example, Gloria asks Eddie Brunner if he can think of anyone with strong character and high purpose, that is, of a member of the 'new' generation! 31

The urban nature of BUTTERFIELD 8 is explicit throughout the novel, but it is seldom expressed formally, an exception being Weston Liggett's impression of New York City as he departs aboard the City of Essex.³² The emphasis is not on the city per se, therefore, but upon the style of life that it generates. In this sense, O'Hara's New York is equal to that of Roth, Smith, Fitzgerald or Dos Passos, the distinctive feature being the forceful

30. Ibid, p.63.

31. Ibid, p.165.

32. Ibid, pp.247-251.

condensation outlined in the novel's Legend:

"Starting on December 16, a distinguishing numeral will be added to, and become part of, each central office name in New York City. For example,

HAnover will become HAnover 2
(From an advertisement of the New York Telephone Company, December 8, 1930). 33

33. Ibid, p.iii.

CHAPTER VII

JEWS WITHOUT MONEY

The unabashed and intrusive didacticism of Michael Gold's criticism of American society and the American Dream during the approximate period of the 1920s distinguishes his autobiographical novel, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY,¹ from CALL IT SLEEP,² A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN,³ THE GREAT GATSBY,⁴ MANHATTAN TRANSFER,⁵ and BUTTERFIELD 8.⁶ Indeed, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY is a tale of Jewish poverty in one of New York City's ghettos, a symbol for the Jews' universal ghetto, and its literary characteristics are poverty and melancholy. In this sense, it is important to note, further, that Gold's expressed intention was to write a defence of his 'race.'⁷

In doing so, Gold establishes the milieu of

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1. Michael Gold, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY, (New York, 1935).
 2. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970).
 3. Betty Smith, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, (New York, 1968).
 4. F.Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973).
 5. John Dos Passos, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, (Boston, Fourth Printing, Sentry Edition, no date given).
 6. John O'Hara, BUTTERFIELD 8, (New York, 1969). Gold's 'revolutionary call' is examined at greater length by Charles Angoff, "Mike Gold: Leader of the Proletarian Culture," in Angoff's THE TONE OF THE TWENTIES AND OTHER ESSAYS, (South Brunswick, New Jersey, 1966), pp.182-188; and by Harlan Hawthorne Hatcher, "Proletarian Novel," in Hatcher's CREATING THE MODERN PROLETARIAN NOVEL, (New York, 1935), pp.262-274.
 7. Gold, op.cit., pp.7-10.

a "streetwalker"⁸ as America sells itself for what the children of the novel mockingly claim to be fifty cents a night. Indeed, young Michael's environment is dominated by prostitution and Tammany Hall, a point highlighted when Gold says that the ghetto was populated by recent immigrants who had turned their backs on the harsh conditions in their native land in order to create a new and promising life in the United States of America. Instead,

"They found awaiting them the sweatshops,
the bawdy houses and Tammany Hall." 9

In this sense, disenchantment and a crushing sensation of futility become early motifs in the novel, and are illustrated by the number of pious Jews who detested prostitution yet knew that there was nothing that they could do to remove it. Indeed, when Michael is punished by his mother for taunting some of the prostitutes in the neighbourhood, the discipline is largely ineffective. It was a

"Vain beating; the East Side street could not be banished with a leather strap. It was my world; it was my mother's world too. We had to live in it, and learn what it chose to teach us." 10

The beating occurred on the same day that Michael

8. This term was first used by Robert T. Heilman, "The Dream Metaphor, Some Ramifications," in David Madden (ed.), AMERICAN DREAMS, AMERICAN NIGHTMARES, (Carbondale, 1971), p.4. See footnote 22 in Chapter One of this thesis.

9. Gold, op.cit., p.14.

10. Ibid, p.19.

turned five. At his party, he heard his first tales of Dybbuks¹¹ which haunt both the 'old' world and the 'new' world. Significantly, the 'devils' are at once spiritual and temporal, and are the enemies of hope. The tales of pogroms and the New York environment are distorted, however, and while the pogrom is equal to the violence of the streets on the East Side, both become confused or exaggerated as they are passed on, thus assuming the frightening form of half- or non-truths.¹² It is shrewd, therefore, that Gold picks this moment to set an incident in which two shots are fired in the yard below the Gold's apartment, after which one man lay dead on the ground. The simple comment is that,

"All of us left the windows and went back to the singing, and story-telling. It was commonplace, this shooting. The American police would take care of it. It was discussed for some minutes, then forgotten by the birthday party." 13

Having established prostitution as the symbol for an empty, ungenerous and dehumanizing environment, Gold adds a sustained ironic conceit dealing with fornication solely at its 'lower' and non-procreative levels.¹⁴ Indeed, when Michael is exposed to a whore at work, sex becomes

11. Devils.

12. Gold, op.cit., pp.20-23.

13. Ibid, p.24.

14. Ibid, Chapter Two, "How Babies Are Made," pp.25-35.

an inhuman activity to him and he learns only in later life that sex and be 'good' as well as 'evil.' The seductions of the East Side are depicted, therefore, as being ruthless and malignant, but they are also avenues to the successful realization of the American Dream. Harry the Pimp exemplifies the issue at hand. He was not brutal, he never had physical contact with any of the girls who worked for him, and he saw himself as their benefactor in that, through him, they could earn enough money to send back for the rest of their families.¹⁵ Harry was handsome and dapper, a figure of affluence and of influence, and Michael says,

"Next to Jake Wolf, the saloonkeeper, he was our pattern of American success. People envied him. He had a big pull with Tammany Hall. He owned a gambling house, and spoke perfect English.

His favourite advice to the young and unsuccessful was to learn English." 16

In this sense, Harry's activities are neither right nor wrong.

In contrast, Michael's parents condemn the harsh excesses that surround them, and he states that,

"My parents hated all this filth. But it was America, one had to accept it ... It's

15. As unenviable as the plight may appear to be, the girls' desire to bring their families to America suggests that even though it seemed to be at its nadir, they still maintained their trust of America as and in dream. This point is more often evident in literature than it is in social history.

16. Gold, op.cit., p.29

impossible to live in a tenement without being mixed up with the tragedies and cockroaches of one's neighbors. There is no privacy in a tenement." 17

Without privacy they are deprived of freedom, and the position of the tenement dwellers exposes a disturbing flaw in American society as well as a defect in the American Dream. In short, it signifies a direct invasion against individual and corporate liberty, and it is as discriminatory as it is irresistible. In JEWS WITHOUT MONEY, lack of privacy is not, however, a totally negative force. The affairs of neighbours, for example, become those of each tenement dweller, and because Michael's mother was a good listener, her house became a center for those who had problems and were unfortunate. Because of this, Michael heard stories and learned of experiences that his youth would otherwise have precluded him from knowing.

He was familiar, for example, with the stories of the prostitutes. He says that most of them

"were simple people. They were like peasants who have been drafted into an army. They lived in the slime and horror of the trenches, knowing why as little as soldiers." 18

Masha was a prostitute. She was blind as a result of a

17. Ibid, p.30.

18. Ibid.

pogrom in Russia, and was nick-named "Sweetheart of the Yellow Cholera"¹⁹ because, one night, she slept with a Chinaman who the other girls had avoided. This illustrates the girls' prejudice vis-à-vis Masha, blind, and unable to distinguish between nationalities. In general, the girls were literally starved into their profession, and once they had entered it they could not leave it for fear of starving again.²⁰ Be this as it may, Katie Gold complains to her landlord that they have a detrimental effect upon the children in the building. She is told that the same girls paid three times the rent she did, and promptly at that.²¹

In many ways, therefore, the cards are stacked against Gold's characters who have also to clear the hurdle of intolerance. When Michael first goes to school, for example, his teacher discriminates against him because he is an un-American 'Kike.'²² In this sense, the teacher is only part of the conspiracy of "Ku Klux moralizers"²³ who condemn Jews to the violent tradition of Christ killers. Conversely, Gold maintains that the Jews are peaceful and timidly bookish, and that,

19. Ibid, p.33.

20. Ibid, p.34. Gold comments that he had "never heard of a millionaire's daughter who became a five-cent whore."Ibid.

21. Ibid, p.35.

22. Ibid, pp.36-37.

23. Ibid, p.37.

"it is America that has taught the sons
of tubercular Jewish tailors how to kill." 24

In addition,

"America is so rich and fat, because it
has eaten the tragedy of millions of
immigrants." 25

and Michael's ears

"still ring with the lamentations of the
lonely old Jews without money:

'I cash clothes, I cash clothes, my
God, why hast thou foresaken me?'" 26

In this context, and particularly in the context of
American intolerance during the 1920s, the 'American'
Jew is radically estranged from a society that denies
him full citizenship.

Even so, the East Side could be homogeneous when
required. This factor has already been demonstrated
in A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN when a child-molester was at
large, and it is repeated in JEWS WITHOUT MONEY for the
same reason. Michael sets out with Joey Cohen on an
expedition to Cheap Haber's. They never reach their
destination, however, because a man beckons Michael's
friend into an alley to earn a nickel.²⁷ Joey rushes
back screaming, and it is not Jews, nor Italians, nor
Irish, nor Germans, nor even Americans that beat the
pederast insensible, but East Siders. For their part,
Michael states that,

"Never would Joey or I quite trust a

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p.41.

26. Ibid., p.56.

27. Gold gives the following description of the man: "His
rusty yellow face was covered with sores. He was gruesome.
He was like a corpse in the first week of decomposition."
Ibid., p.58.

stranger again. Never would we walk without fear through the East Side. Now we knew it was a jungle, where wild beast prowled, and toadstools grew in poisoned soil. 28

The toadstool and the poisoned earth reflect the barren nature attributed to city life, and the children's fears are suggestive of the awesome and often hostile power of the city as an agent.

As perceived from the perspective of New York City during the 1920s, the indictment of American society and the American Dream moves one step further when America is represented as Death. An example of this is

"The backyard ... a curious spot. It had once been a graveyard. Some of the old American headstones had been used to pave our Jewish yard. The inscriptions were dated a hundred years ago. But we had read them all, we were tired of weaving romances around the ruins of America." 29

Indeed, it was a violent world in which cats were dropped from rooftops to test whether or not they really had nine lives. It was,

"a world of violence and stone, there were too many cats, there were too many children." 30

They all suffer, starve, or die, in equal proportion.

Within this environment there were certain havens, and Gold provides an interesting insight into the immigrant experience as Michael relates that it was not unusual for him to wake in the morning and find other

28. Ibid, p.60.

29. Ibid, p.62.

30. Ibid, p.63.

immigrants in his house or bed. Indeed, it was customary that the more established immigrants gave aid to the newer ones, that,

"Every tenement home was a Plymouth Rock like ours. The hospitality was taken for granted until the new family rented its own flat." 31

Mendel Bum was one of the immigrants in question, and he is important because he beats his would-be oppressors at their own game. He allows the 'goyim', for example, to baptize him if they will give him a bag of potatoes in return. This ability to fool the Christians and the 'Americans' made him a figure of pride among the Jews,

"It was flattering to Jews to know that he often passed himself off as a real American, yet talked Yiddish and was loyal to his race." 32

In contrast, Michael's father, a story-teller who believed in stories, is less fortunate. He was drawn to America out of envy of his cousin, Sam Kravitz, who was said to have risen from rags to riches. Eventually, he became a partner in Kravitz' business and the two men prospered. Herman Gold then made a fatal mistake. He honeymooned his wife at Niagara Falls, and when he returned to New York he found that the partnership had been dissolved in his absence, and that he had no

31. Ibid, p.73.

32. Ibid, p.80. Gold postulates the contrary thesis that there was no such thing as Jews in the plural, that each Jew was first and foremost an individual man: "Jews are as individualized as are the Chinese and Anglo-Saxons. There are no racial types. My father, for example, was like a certain kind of Irishman more than the stenciled stage Jew." Ibid, p.81.

rights of redress. A poor man again, he became a house-painter who contracted lead poisoning and despaired that,

"I must die! It is all useless. A curse on Columbus. A curse on America, the thief! It is a land where the lice make fortunes, and the good men starve." 33

Indeed, his spirit is deflated as the American Dream turns out to be only a dream. His business dealings with Baruch Goldfarb and Zechariah Cohen result in his being exploited, cheated and then abandoned, and the dream crumbles into nightmare when he falls from a scaffold and breaks every bone in both feet. By the end of the novel he is a banana peddler, and a symbol of utter hopelessness,

"he was silent as one who had been crushed by a calamity. Hope died in him; months passed, a year passed; he was still peddling bananas." 34

America, the land of promise, had broken him.

Indeed, set in New York City during the 1920s, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY is punctuated by disillusionment, corruption, and defeat, a point dramatized by the tale of Reb Samuel Ashkenazi, a pious, tradition-oriented Jew. Although patient in the Diaspora, Reb Samuel feared that America's influence would ultimately generate a decline in traditional Judaism, and that there was clear need of an

33. Ibid, p.112.

34. Ibid, p.298. The disfigurement of human character by poverty and fear is examined at greater length by Walter B. Rideout, "Class War," in Rideout's THE RADICAL NOVEL IN THE UNITED STATES, 1900-1954, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp.135-164.

ultra-orthodox rabbi and a permanent synagogue if this process was to be arrested. Accordingly, funds were raised for a new synagogue and for the passage to America of rabbi Schmarya who was a Zaddick, a descendant of the thirty six wise men of Israel.

When Reb Samuel's dream comes true and the new rabbi arrives, therefore, there is reason for celebration.

God could come to life again,

"At last ! At last ! Hope had arrived on
the East Side. God was looking down on
Chrystie Street." 35

Michael is less impressed, and thinks that the new rabbi is fat, dull, and smug. His instincts are accurate. Indeed, the defender of Israel "changed in the electric air of America."³⁶ He milked the community Reb Samuel had formed for all it was worth, and then moved on to a less orthodox and more affluent congregation in the Bronx. The saviour was up for sale. In this sense, therefore, M.B.Folsom is correct in his claim that, in the end, Gold's novel is more about the moneyless than it is about the Jews.³⁷

As such, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY is a valid if not

35. Gold, op.cit., p.199.

36. Ibid, p.202.

37. Michael Brewster Folsom, "The Education of Michael Gold," in D.Madden (ed.), PROLETARIAN WRITERS OF THE THIRTIES, (Carbondale, 1968), p.242.

an informative³⁸ interpretation of life on the East Side of New York City during the 1920s. Indeed, with a central motif of the poverty and injustices attendant to gutter life, the novel uses the decade and the city as machetes with which the author slashes his uncompromising way through the American Dream. The Gold's and their neighbours are thus cut off from the past. Instead of qualifying as participants in the alluring traditions of democracy and possibility, long established as the definitively American birthright, Gold's characters are in fact disqualified by the racial, linguistic, religious and financial impediments that prevent their being accepted as 'wholly American.' In this sense, their milieu is squalid, treacherous, discriminatory, and hostile.

Indeed, the power of Gold's perception is his insistence that, in practice, the American Dream had never been fully if at all operational, and that belief in the American Dream involves, of necessity, a knowledge of the American nightmare.

38. Gold's claim that insobriety was not common among Jews, for example, could have important implications for the Prohibition issue. Gold, op.cit., p.114. In addition, Gold's suggestion that "Religion was a fervent affair on the East Side. Every persecuted race becomes a race of fanatics." Ibid, p.181, is contrary to the argument that American religion was 'depressed' during the decade. For further reference see: R.T.Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," CHURCH HISTORY, Volume XXIX, Number 1, (March, 1960), pp.3-16; E.R.Sandeen, "The Fundamentals: The Last Flowering of the Millinarian-Conservative Alliance," JOURNAL OF PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY, Volume XLVI, (1969), pp.55-73; and E.R.Sandeen, "Towards an Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," CHURCH HISTORY, Volume XXXVI, (1967).

This conviction is by no means new. Rather, it dates from the founding of the American Dream and it has remained present in American history and in American literature throughout. Gold's vital distinctiveness is that, positioning himself in an urban jungle towards the end of the 1920s, he not only describes the corrosive influence of the American Dream, but also posits a legitimate if radical alternative to it. This point is made perfectly clear at the end of the novel when Michael says,

"At times I thought of cutting my throat. At other times I dreamed of running away to the far west ... I prayed on the tenement roof in moonlight to the Jewish Messiah who would redeem the world ... I needed desperate stimulants; I was ready for anything ... I began drinking and whoring ...

And I worked. And my father and mother grew sadder and older. It went on for years ... Yet I was only one among a million others.

A man on an East Side soap-box, one night, proclaimed that out of the despair, melancholy and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty.

I listened to him.

O workers' Revolution, you brought hope to me ... You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit.

O Revolution that forced me to think, to struggle and to live.

O great Beginning!" 39

It is pertinent, therefore, that in tribute to Gold's craftsmanship, Michael Folsom states that,

39. Gold, op.cit., p.309.

"in his desire to establish and argue for a font and root of value and art in utter defiance of the dominant cultures, Gold invented what looks like a twentieth-century urban version of the old pastoral, noble-savage, feudal-commune motif ... His hope remains a dream, but it remains ... His dream is fixed in the needs of the poor." 40

Gold's accomplishment is that the man left standing on the soap-box is, in many senses, without an American precedent. He is part of a chain and, perhaps a new figure in social and literary history, signifies the beginning of a new and revolutionary American dream.

It is a bonus, therefore, that Gold is consistently in charge of his urban environment, and he states, as an example, that,

"Earth's trees, grass, flowers could not grow on my street; but the rose of syphilis bloomed by night and by day." 41

Also,

"Our East River is a sun-spangled open sewer running with oily scum and garbage ... It stinks with the many deaths of New York. Often while swimming I had to push dead swollen dogs and vegetables from my face." 42

JEWS WITHOUT MONEY is, therefore, a crushing indictment of tenement life, and the urge to represent the city as an elongated obscenity is qualified by the finesse of authorial perception. Perfectly balanced between fact and

40. Folsom, op.cit., p.251. The point that there is still faith in the continuance of a lost world is also made by Malcolm Cowley, "The Michael Golden Legend" in Cowley's THINK BACK ON US: A CONTEMPORARY CHRONICLE OF THE 1920s, (Carbondale, 1967), p.196.

41. Gold, op.cit., p.15.

42. Ibid, p.39.

fantasy, for example, Gold says that,

"New York is a devil's dream: the most urbanized city in the world. It is all geometry angles and stone. It is mythical, a city buried by a volcano. No grass is found in this petrified city, no big living trees, no flowers, no bird but the drab little lecherous sparrow, no soil, loam, earth; fresh earth to smell, earth to walk on, to roll on, and love like a woman." 43

In the context of the city, two other factors in the novel are noteworthy. The first relates to the circular patterns of migration in the city: as in the ripple on the pond, as one 'nationality' moves out of a given area they are replaced by newer immigrants of different national origin. Gold notes, therefore, that,

"Every ten years there has been a new population on the East Side. As fast as a generation makes some money, it moves to a better section of the city." 44

This important factor has been largely ignored by the other authors in study and, apart from its contribution to verisimilitude, explains that each wave of migration leaves its own landmarks, and that this accounts, as an example, for the presence of a Lutheran Church in the middle of a Jewish neighbourhood.⁴⁵

The second factor relates to a different aspect of mobility in the city, public transport. When the Golds use the elevated train one Sunday, for example, it is overcrowded, dirty, noisy, and "worse than a cattle

43. Ibid, p.40.

44. Ibid, p.215.

45. Ibid, p.180.

car."⁴⁶ Whenever it stopped, the people in the train were thrown against each other, and Gold claims that in the midst of the

"bedlam of legs and arms, sneezing, spitting, cursing, sighing ... [the train was] ... a super-tenement on wheels."⁴⁷

In terms of New York City and the American Dream, therefore, Herman Gold comments that, in Roumania, a visit to a park involved a short, pleasant walk. In New York it was like a fight for life.

46. Ibid, p.149.

47. Ibid, p.150.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS LONELYHEARTS

While CALL IT SLEEP,¹ A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN,² THE GREAT GATSBY,³ MANHATTAN TRANSFER,⁴ BUTTERFIELD 8,⁵ and JEWS WITHOUT MONEY⁶ chronicle the discrepancies between the promise of the United States, its materialism, its wealth, and the spiritual and material poverty in which so many of its people live, Nathanael West's surrealistic novelette, MISS LONELYHEARTS,⁷ set in New York City during the American 1920s, functions as the final thread of hysteria in the collapse of a social order associated with high density city life and the American Dream which West depicts, towards the end of the decade, as an all-engulfing nightmare. In short, MISS LONELYHEARTS is a Dream Dump.⁸

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1. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970).
 2. Betty Smith, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, (New York, 1968).
 3. F.Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973).
 4. John Dos Passos, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, (Boston, Fourth Printing, Sentry Edition, no date given).
 5. John O'Hara, BUTTERFIELD 8, (New York, 1969).
 6. Michael Gold, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY, (New York, 1935).
 7. Nathanael West, MISS LONELYHEARTS & THE DAY OF THE LOCUST, (New York, 1969). THE DAY OF THE LOCUST is not included in this thesis.
 8. David D.Galloway, "Nathanael West's Dream Dump," CRITIQUE: STUDIES IN MODERN FICTION, Volume VI, Number 3, (1963), pp.46-64.

It is appropriate, therefore, that Miss Lonelyhearts, a male writer of an advice column for a newspaper in New York City, receives upwards of thirty letters a day, all of them desperately searching for some sincere answer, and all "stamped with the dough of suffering with a heart-shaped cookie knife."⁹ The world is devoid of reason and the Miss Lonelyhearts are the "priests of twentieth-century America"¹⁰ which had, in the 1920s, a religion of loneliness and sterility. Accordingly, Daniel Aaron is correct when he claims that MISS LONELYHEARTS,

"must be read against a background of crashing banks, breadlines, and the WPA: it is symptomatic of economic as well as of moral stagnation." 11

Nonetheless, the novel is a religious metaphor,¹² and while the depicted social order is dead, love, particularly as expressed through "Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, the Miss Lonelyhearts of Miss Lonelyhearts,"¹³ is the remedy for all sorrow. As a philanthropist in a selfish world, therefore, Miss Lonelyhearts develops "an almost insane sensitiveness to order"¹⁴ and he attempts to

9. West, op.cit., p.1.

10. Ibid, p.4.

11. Daniel Aaron, "'The Truly Monstrous': A Note on Nathanael West," PARTISAN REVIEW, Volume XIV, Issue 1, (1947), p.101.

12. This point is developed at greater length in Thomas M.Lorch, "West's Miss Lonelyhearts: Scepticism Mitigated?" RENAISSANCE, Volume XVIII, (1966), pp.99-109.

13. West, op.cit., p.6.

14. Ibid, p.10. In this sense, C.Carroll Hollis claims that "Miss Lonelyhearts tries desperately but unsuccessfully to find some other answer to the problem of pain to replace the Christian love he has himself rejected." C. Carroll Hollis, "Nathanael West and 'The Lonely Crowd,'" THOUGHT, Volume XXXIII, (1958), p.400.

locate it in Betty, his fiancée. He discovers, however, that he is inarticulate in her presence because her order was based on arbitrary delineations, and that his confusion was more significant than her order. Indeed, whenever Betty found faults, she attributed them to sickness. In this sense, Lonelyhearts says that she has,

"No morality, only medicine. Well I'm not sick. I don't need any of your damned aspirin. I've got a Christ complex. Humanity ... I'm a humanity lover." 15

As such, Lonelyhearts' world is wide enough to include the readers of his column, but Betty's world is not.

Lonelyhearts search for order returns him to Delahanty's bar where he overhears a conversation about a female novelist who, pretending to be one of the locals, had gone into the area to find a base for her fiction. Her ruse was detected, however, and she was locked in a room for three days while men had sexual intercourse with her and, on the third day, they sold tickets to Niggers.¹⁶ This grotesque incident supports Josephine Herbst's claim that,

"the people in West's novels are all bit players in a violent modern drama of impersonal collective forces. There are no big shots; no tycoons; no one can be said to be in the money. The only valid currency is suffering." 17

15. West, op.cit., p.13.

16. Ibid, p.14.

17. Josephine Herbst, "Nathanael West," THE KENYON REVIEW, Volume XXIII, (Autumn, 1961), p.611. In addition, "The world is not only in deep distress; its people are captives." Ibid, p.612.

In this sense, Lonelyhearts feels sorry for all the parties involved because they have all lost something.

Indeed, the distinctiveness of the generation was not that they were lost but that they had lost, a point that throws new light upon conventional interpretations of the period, and which is illustrated by the plight of Lonelyhearts' friends who, for example,

"had believed in literature, had believed in Beauty and in personal expression as an absolute end. When they lost this belief, they lost everything. Money and fame meant nothing to them. They were not worldly men." 18

Nonetheless, they are critical of Lonelyhearts who they see as an escapist whose religious idiosyncrasies would be interesting only to a psychiatrist. Lonelyhearts responds to this cynicism with a Christian smile:

"Like Shrike, the man they imitated, they were machines for making jokes. A button machine makes buttons, no matter what the power used, foot, steam or electricity. They, no matter what the motivating force, death, love or God, made jokes." 19

The position that the American Dream had reached in American society during the 1920s is desolate if not negligible, therefore, because Americans are reduced to the status of machines. In this sense, Lonelyhearts is angry that they are trying to slot him into Christ's shoes.²⁰

The ineffectuality of Prohibition is suggested by the accepted freedom of access to Delahanty's bar.

18. West, op.cit., p.14.

19. Ibid, p.15.

20. Ibid, p.16.

Indeed, by the time he leaves the speakeasy, Lonelyhearts is very drunk. He and Ned Gates walk into a public lavatory and see an old man sitting on a toilet bowl with its lid down and the door of the cubicle open. Gates wants him to leave with them and is anxious to smash the man's attempt to put up a front. Claiming to be one of the decade's emotionless scientists whose sole concern was the collection of data, therefore, Gates asks the old man how long had he been a homosexual. Lonelyhearts apologises for this breach at the very instant that he,

"felt as he had felt years before, when he had accidentally stepped on a small frog. Its spilled guts had filled him with pity, but when its sufferings had become real to his senses, his pity had turned to rage and he had beaten it frantically until it was dead." 21

By stating that he and Ned were psychologists who wanted to help him, therefore, Lonelyhearts also directs questions at the old man and excuses them in the name of science. When the old man remained silent, however, Lonelyhearts reacted as he had done with the frog, and is extremely violent. In thrashing the old man he was,

"twisting the arms of Desperate, Broken-hearted, Sick-of-it-all, Disillusioned-with-tubercular-husband." 22

In this sense, the old man is yet another victim on Lonelyhearts' ultimately overwhelming list, and science, which had emerged from World War One practically unblemished, was in fact exposed as a potentially destructive and deceptive force.

21. Ibid, p.17.

22. Ibid, p.18.

These very elements were also evident in the mass media which may have concerned itself with 'Ballyhoo,' but which also appears to have been preoccupied with the dull and desolate routine of everyday life. This factor, in itself, brings a fresh insight into the role of the media during the 1920s. Nonetheless, West is hostile towards the newspapers and Lonelyhearts is thus part of a perverted and corrosive agent that opposes at the same time that it generates what David Galloway describes as,

"the persistent theme of man's self-delusionment in a world of frustrating and finally destructive dreams ...
 /and/... the attack on the American Success dream." 23

It is significant, therefore, that Lonelyhearts once attempted to get fired from his job by recommending suicide to a correspondent, and that Shrike's sole criticism of this was a warning that their job was to increase the paper's circulation, and not to decrease it.²⁴ Nothing was sacred.

Indeed, Miss Lonelyhearts' world is a desolate waste land,

23. This point is supported by: Marc L. Ratner, "'Anywhere Out of this World:' Baudelaire and Nathanael West," AMERICAN LITERATURE, Volume XXXI, Number 4, (January, 1960), p.456; V.S. Pritchett, "Miss Lonelyhearts," in Pritchett's THE LIVING NOVEL AND LATER APPRECIATIONS, (New York, 1964), p.276; and by Robert J. Andreach, "Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts: Between the Dead Pan and the Unborn Christ," MODERN FICTION STUDIES, Volume XII, Number 2, (Summer, 1966), p.251. The quote is from Galloway, op.cit., p.46.

24. West, op.cit., p.18.

"A desert ... not of sand, but of rust and body dirt, surrounded by a back-yard fence on which are posters describing the events of the day. Mother slays five with ax, slays seven, slays nine ... Babe slams two, slams three ... Inside the fence Desperate, Broken-hearted, Disillusioned-with-tubercular-husband and the rest were gravely forming the letters MISS LONELYHEARTS out of white-washed clam shells as if decorating the lawn of a rural depot." 25

It is fitting, therefore, that Lonelyhearts is the victim of his main letter for the day. It was written by Fay Doyle whose husband was crippled and whose problem was too sensitive to relate in the mail. Eventually, Lonelyhearts goes to her home and is bullied into 'fieldwork:'

"Some fifteen minutes later, he crawled out of bed like an exhausted swimmer leaving the surf." 26

After she has told him her problems, and for no reason other than that he was frightened, Lonelyhearts tells her she is pretty. In reward, she kissed him again and then dragged him back to bed.²⁷ The women of MISS LONELYHEARTS, Mary Shrike, Betty, and Fay Doyle, are all experienced

25. Ibid, p.25. J.F.Light adds that "In this world of decay and violence the only way that man is able to exist is through dreams ... /but/ ... the commercialization and stereotyping of man's dreams have led to a weakening of their power ... This is the worst betrayal of modern man." James F.Light, "Miss Lonelyhearts: The imagery of Nightmare," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume VIII, (1956), p.318.

26. West, op.cit., p.28.

27. Ibid, p.30. Shrike has already suggested that Miss Lonelyhearts gets Fay Doyle with child and thus increase the paper's circulation. Ibid, p.26. Pritchett, op.cit., states that "Shrike is one of West's many attacks on the dream generators of the mass media." Ibid, p.278. This point is also made by Galloway, op.cit., p.46.

and worldly. They support the contention that the social historians have distorted the position women occupied in American society during the 1920s, and that they have been misleading in stating that there was a 'revolution' in morals and manners during the decade. Indefatigable, Fay Doyle proves the point, and her sexual prowess is in no way unique to or characteristic of the 1920s.

West uses the incident with Fay Doyle to clarify his vision, thus creating a perspective that David Galloway suggests is,

"of a world which, by distorting and negating man's needs and desires, leaves him a senseless shell, unable to fulfill his dreams." 28

In this context, therefore, it is suggestive that Miss Lonelyhearts became physically ill as a result of his experience with Fay Doyle. On the third day of his 'confinement,' Lonelyhearts' imagination returned to him, and he,

"found himself in the window of a pawnshop full of fur coats, diamond rings, watches, shotguns, fishing tackle, mandolins. All these things were the paraphernalia of suffering." 29

He awoke to find Betty at his bedside and confided to her that his occupation had trapped him. Indeed, he can never get away from it because he could never forget the letters if ever he did leave. In this sense, he is in the wasteland of a world without values, and he tells Betty that,

28. Ibid, p.63. Galloway adds that "West is more extreme than Fitzgerald in his renunciation of the sham of American romanticism." Ibid.

29. West, op.cit., p.30.

"A man is hired to give advice to the readers of a newspaper. The job is a circulation stunt and the whole staff considers it a joke ... He too considers the job is a joke, but after several months at it, the joke begins to escape him. He sees that the majority of the letters are profoundly humble pleas for moral and spiritual advice, that they are inarticulate expressions of genuine suffering. He also discovers that his correspondents take him seriously. For the first time in his life, he is forced to examine the values by which he lives. This examination shows him that he is the victim of the joke and not its perpetrator." 30

Trapped in the dehumanizing void characteristic of life in New York City during the 1920s, therefore, Miss Lonelyhearts' America is,

"more than a reflection of man's personal and cultural degeneration; it is a land in which evil and human suffering stalk in their naked horror." 31

The important factor is that this landscape is at first restricted to the city, and Betty, who had been raised in the country, thus diagnoses Lonelyhearts' problems as "city troubles." 32

In this sense, the feel, the sound, the smell, the freshness, and the cleanness of the country might rehabilitate Lonelyhearts and resolve his despair. Betty

30. Ibid, p.32. Hollis, op.cit., adds that "For Miss Lonelyhearts, faith is lost, life becomes unbearable without it, and faith is regained only in hysteria." Ibid, p.407.

31. Edmond L.Volpe, "The Waste Land of Nathanael West," RENASCENCE, Volume XIII, Number 3, (Spring, 1961), p.71. Galloway, op.cit., notes in addition that West's novel is imbued with "the warning that life is a hoax, an April-fool purse embroidered with dreams." Ibid, p.63.

32. West, op.cit., p.32. In this sense, Pritchett, op.cit., claims that, through Lonelyhearts, West was "preoccupied with hysteria as the price paid for accepting the sentimentalities of a national dream ... he was appalled by the banality of city civilization." Ibid, p.276.

says to him, therefore, that,

"You are fed up with the city and its teeming millions. The ways and means of men, as getting and lending and spending, are too much with you. The bus takes too long, while the subway is always crowded." 33

At first, Lonelyhearts enjoys the alternative 'escape' into the country. However, under the fresh air and life, under the trees, there was a sadness, a dampness, a funereal hush of death and decomposition.³⁴ Indeed, the moment they returned to the city and reached the Bronx slums, Lonelyhearts immediately knew that Betty's 'cure' had failed. He saw,

"Crowds of people moving through the street with a dream-like violence." 35

and generalized that,

"Men have always fought their misery with dreams. Although dreams were once powerful they have been made puerile by the movies, radio, and newspapers. Among many betrayals this one is the worst." 36

As if this was not enough, Lonelyhearts received a very long and detailed letter from someone named Broad Shoulders. It was full of hopelessness and enormous despair, and, as Broad Shoulders stated in her postscript, she, like Lonelyhearts, was not really broad shouldered and could not carry her burden.³⁷

33. West, op.cit., p.33.

34. Ibid, p.38. This intimates that the problems confronting American society in the 1920s were national before they were urban.

35. Ibid, pp.38-39.

36. Ibid, p.39.

37. Ibid, pp.40-43. She is not, therefore, one of the decade's popularly 'liberated' women.

Because dreams did not work in modern life,³⁸ therefore, and this is probably true for a large number of urbanites during the 1920s, Lonelyhearts has no safety-valve. In this sense, art, suicide, and drugs are not real alternatives, and, in pointing out that God alone could provide a release, Shrike dictates a letter from Lonelyhearts to Christ.³⁹

Indeed, with their indictment of New York society during the 1920s, the letters generated Lonelyhearts' belief in God and it is valid to argue that they not only caused his crisis of belief, but also resulted in a transference of deity, or at least of humanity and love, to himself. This is made clear when Lonelyhearts meets Mr. Doyle in Delahanty's speakeasy. Doyle had written many letters to Miss Lonelyhearts, but had never posted any of them. He handed one of them to Lonelyhearts and,

"While Miss Lonelyhearts was puzzling out the crabbed writing, Doyle's damp hand accidentally touched his under the table. He jerked away, but then drove his hand back and forced it to grasp the cripple's. After finishing the letter, he did not let it go, but pressed it firmly with all the love he could manage. At first the cripple covered his embarrassment by disguising the meaning of the clasp with a handshake, but he soon gave in to it and they sat silently hand in hand." 40

The two men then returned to the Doyles' where Lonelyhearts attempts to force a reconciliation between Doyle and his wife. The attempt fails and Lonelyhearts feels ridiculous as a result. He is unable to turn to Christ even, and

39. West, op.cit., p.35.

40. Ibid, p.47.

the incident leaves him feeling like "an empty bottle that is being slowly filled with warm, dirty water."⁴¹

After the Doyle fiasco, Lonelyhearts returned home and fell into a deep, innocent sleep. He was woken by Shrike who arrived with four friends to play a game he had made up called "Everyman his own Miss Lonelyhearts,"⁴² in which Lonelyhearts is the saviour, the man with the moral and spiritual answers, the provider of "a slogan, a cause, an absolute value and a raison d'être."⁴³ When Lonelyhearts remains serene, Shrike's faith in him is extended.

Soon after this incident, Lonelyhearts meets Betty who confesses that she is pregnant. He convinces her to have the child and promises in return that he will make the effort to get a new and different job. He is satisfied, therefore, that "The rock had been thoroughly tested and found perfect."⁴⁴

Robert J. Andreach states, however, that Lonelyhearts is finally overwhelmed by the misery of those who appeal to him.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, on the night of Betty's disclosure, and in the midst of a 'religious experience,' Lonelyhearts is satisfied that he has submitted himself before God, and that He had approved of him. When Doyle arrives, therefore, Lonelyhearts rushes open-armed down the stairs

41. Ibid, p.50.

42. Ibid, p.51.

43. Ibid, p.52.

44. Ibid, p.56.

45. Andreach, op.cit., p.252.

to meet him. Doyle, who was holding a package wrapped in newspaper, shouted a warning to Lonelyhearts who did not heed it because he was so used to opening his arms wide enough to embrace all mankind that he could not close them sufficiently to hold but one man. Doyle attempts to leave, but his escape is cut off by the arrival of Betty. The two men struggle, and the novelette ends as,

"The gun inside the package exploded and Miss Lonelyhearts fell, dragging the cripple with him. They both rolled part of the way down the stairs." 46

In terms of New York City, the American Dream, and the American 1920s, therefore, Nathanael West's historical perspective is pessimistic but reliable. Indeed, MISS LONELYHEARTS makes a vital contribution towards any understanding of the period because its very bleakness is, as Alan Ross posits in his introduction to Nathanael West, socially representational.⁴⁷ In this sense, West's genius was that he registered a society in full decline, and thus he reflected the sense of futility that is said to have pervaded American society in the period before and after the collapse of Wall Street in 1929. Robert Andreach is as correct in his claim that West's milieu was "the sterile wasteland and the empty American Dream,"⁴⁸ therefore, as Marc Ratner is in his

46. West, op.cit., p.58.

47. For further reference see Alan Ross, "Novelist-Philosopher: XIV - The Dead Centre: An Introduction to Nathanael West," HORIZON, Volume XVIII, Number 106, (October, 1948), pp.284-296.

48. Andreach, op.cit., p.251.

assertion that West "attacked the false dream symptomatic of the American malaise."⁴⁹ From any angle, West's "sobbing Americana"⁵⁰ is abrasive and incisive in its translation of the American Dream of democracy and possibility into despotism and impossibility, and, as such, it is in every sense a legitimate statement of social history.

Indeed, West's interpretation of life in New York City during the American 1920s is as instructive as it is imaginative.⁵¹ With its motifs of hysteria, suffering, loneliness, sterility, violence, and chaos, MISS LONELYHEARTS is balanced between what Josephine Herbst has termed, "the world of things and the dream world, between the nightmare and the vaguely aspiring."⁵² In this sense, there are four alternatives, all of which are present in MISS LONELYHEARTS. Man can waver between acceptance and rejection of lesser dreams; he can blind himself to suffering and accept a lesser dream; he can reject all dreams; and he can accept the Christian dream which is associated with faith and universal love.⁵³

Although Miss Lonelyhearts may be said to have accepted the last of these alternatives, it is by no means misleading to argue that the predominant strain in the novel is that of the rejection of almost all aspects of the American Dream and, in some cases, the partial

49. Ratner, op.cit., p.456.

50. Pritchett, op.cit., p.277.

51. This point is developed further in Aaron, op.cit.

52. Herbst, op.cit., p.612.

53. These are dealt with at greater length in Light, op.cit.

acceptance of lesser dreams. In this sense, West's characters are divorced from the past, and any faith they had in alternative forces is stripped away from them as well. This point is illustrated, for example, when science is exposed as a potentially destructive and perverted agent during the incident involving Lonelyhearts, Ned Gates, and the man in the lavatory. Accordingly, the high place occupied by science in the period's social histories could well benefit from a detailed interdisciplinary revision.

In a similar fashion, and West's obvious bias notwithstanding, MISS LONELYHEARTS symbolizes the corrosive influence of the media during the 1920s, thus suggesting that its role in social history should be revised in order to prevent distortion.⁵⁴ Indeed, the very idea of a Miss Lonelyhearts column was conceived in cynicism, and Miss Lonelyhearts himself confesses that he once suggested that suicide would be the answer to the problems of one of his readers. In this sense, the role of the media during the 1920s needs closer attention paid to it, perhaps revealing that the media was irresponsible, and that its favourable tradition of 'progress' during the 1920s is in fact misleading.

It is significant, therefore, that West's America is,

"a desolate scene. Its basic components are threefold: decay and violence and pain ... the basic reality is violence. It exists everywhere." 55

54. This points to a valid research opportunity in 1920s historiography.

55. Light, op.cit., p.317.

and that West,

"makes his distorted world come alive,
perhaps more alive than the everyday
world." 56

Accordingly, the letters Miss Lonelyhearts receives swamp him with the weight of their misery, decay, violence, and pain, and they form a composite character, a prolonged surrealistic symbol, who is finally inarticulate.

Miss Lonelyhearts must, therefore, find order. Unable to locate it in sex, alcohol, drugs, or his fiancée, he turns instead to the city. In this sense,

"He fled to the street, but there chaos was multiple. Broken groups of people hurried past, forming neither stars nor squares. The lamp-posts were badly spaced and the flagging was of different sizes. Nor could he do anything with the harsh clanging sound of street cars and the raw shouts of the hucksters. No repeated group of words would fit their rhythm and no scale could give them meaning." 57

The important factor, and this has eluded the critics even, is that the city, which depends upon smooth and ordered functioning for its survival, is the logical place from which Lonelyhearts should conduct his search.

In MISS LONELYHEARTS, Nathanael West demonstrates an unquestionable ability to record the pace of city life as he progresses from the city described, to the city perceived, to the city abstracted. Through this process he registers the dehumanizing decadence of life in New York City during the American 1920s, and suggests the status of the American Dream when Lonelyhearts, after gazing at an empty sky,

56. Ibid, p.327.

57. West, op.cit., p.11.

"turned his trained eye on the skyscrapers that menaced the little park from all sides. In their tons of forced rock and tortured steel, he discovered what he thought was a clue.

Americans have dissipated their racial energy in an orgy of stone breaking." 58

58. Ibid, p.27.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the American 1920s were characterized by controversy and conflict. The common denominator distinguishing the breach in society was disillusionment with, and rejection or acceptance of, the so-called return to 'Normalcy' which was mainly a pretence that nothing had changed. There was, however, an historical drift away from the American ideals of democracy and individuality. Although the sources and nature of this change are still under review, it is valid to suggest that the generation of the 1920s was not as uprooted as it liked to think, but bitterness and doubt did become an acknowledged part of the American vocabulary.¹ Indeed, the opposition - rebellion is too strong a term - launched against the 'business culture' became a challenge to democracy itself. In this sense, the 'mood' of the 1920s as well as the positioning of the American Dream during the decade progressed from Coolidge's maxim that "the business of America was business"² to Roosevelt's warning that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."³

1. Spiller et al maintain that this was reflected in the "entire literary movement of the American twenties [which was] fresh and promising, varied in talent and bold in achievement, [and which] seems to end almost everywhere on a note of negation and exhaustion." Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas J. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, and Richard M. Ludwick (eds.), LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES: HISTORY, (London, 1969), p.1306.

2. Calvin Coolidge cited in Harry J. Carmen, Harold C. Syrett, and Bernard W. Wishy (eds.), A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, VOLUME II - SINCE 1865, (New York, 1967), p.535.

3. Franklin D. Roosevelt cited in Carmen et al, ibid, p.589.

In many senses, therefore, the 1920s formed what could be termed America's Second Civil War, albeit a 'Cold' one. America was at a crossroads, and the issue was where, exactly, did the battle end? In adhering to or in rejecting the American Dream, two styles of life were at variance, and the initial outcome was decisive but misleading. Aided by the media, the American Dream permeated American society during the decade but it was repudiated throughout by a substantial number of Americans. The remainder, some of whom may have been unaware of what was in fact happening about them, and composed of 'urbanites' and 'ruralites' alike, were indeed voices crying from the wilderness. In this sense, it is difficult to take sides. In the long term, however, the outcome was equivocal, and if the American Dream did 'explode' during the decade, as it is suggested to have done, it has since been restored and can again be cherished as a flattering and definitively American factor.

Be this as it may, the United States was conceived in the country and gradually moved into the city. This process was bound to produce dislocations, and adjustments would have to be made in areas such as politics, religion, education and economics, to name but a few. As such, it left an obvious imprint on American art in general and American literature in particular.⁴

4. Walter Allen states that, henceforth, American heroes were "abstracted, alienated from the society of their times, surrounded as it were by an envelope of emptiness. One might say that society and the characteristic American hero are irreconcilably opposed ... they are ... figures of a dream, projections even of a national unconsciousness." Walter E. Allen, TRADITION AND DREAM: THE ENGLISH AND AMERICAN NOVEL FROM THE TWENTIES TO OUR OWN TIME, (London, 1964), pp.xv.xvi.

Indeed, as David Weimer points out in THE CITY AS METAPHOR, countless Americans have 'experienced' the city, coming to it, going from it, existing in it, their experiences as various as their numbers.⁵ Consequently, the gathering momentum of life in cities has been marked by the increasing use of, and preference for, literature set in cities.

For the purposes of this thesis the urban environment of New York City is critical. Represented in social history as the ultimate citadel, New York City functions as the most intense available example of high density urban life during the American 1920s. As such, it is the logical place to promote and survey the urbanization if not the secularization of American society during the period. Indeed, it is a powerful and cosmopolitan setting in antithesis to but dependent upon the hinterland. It is a place for extremes, a tight symbol for the collectively urban nature of the decade and the seven

5. David Weimer, THE CITY AS METAPHOR, (New York, 1966). Weimer adds that "The ideals that sparked /Fitzgerald's/ imagination swarmed everywhere in American life, as we know, but particularly in its cities - bright talk, perennial youth, clothes, money, alcohol, power, easy emotions, and a consciousness of one's public." Ibid, pp. 99-100.

selected novels,⁶ giving the period its distinctiveness as well as its flow.

As such, it provides a point of departure from which society can be observed in action. The component parts that make up the 'mood' of the 1920s, subjected to severe modifications in the first chapter of this thesis, have the significance of facts per se, and they are discovered as important elements at all levels of life in New York City. But they go no further.

Indeed, reading through the novels, and it must be emphasized that it is the novels themselves that are at work, it would be easy to mistake, token references to the real names, the real events, and other paraphernalia of the 1920s notwithstanding, their exact chronological setting. In this sense, for all that it ignores some evocative and appropriate passages vis-à-vis the creation of a total effect, the social history of the 1920s is reflected at the literary level almost exclusively through the medium of the American Dream as viewed, in this case, from the vantage point of New York City.⁷

6. Henry Roth, CALL IT SLEEP, (New York, 1970).
 Betty Smith, A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN, (New York, 1968).
 F. Scott Fitzgerald, THE GREAT GATSBY, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973).
 John Dos Passos, MANHATTAN TRANSFER, (Boston, Fourth Printing, Sentry Edition, no date given).
 John O'Hara, BUTTERFIELD 8, (New York, 1969).
 Michael Gold, JEWS WITHOUT MONEY, (New York, 1935).
 Nathanael West, MISS LONELYHEARTS & THE DAY OF THE LOCUST, (New York, 1969) THE DAY OF THE LOCUST is not included in this thesis.

7. This suggests that critics have failed to get to the bottom of the decade because they have been too anxious to get to the top of it.

The novelists penalized for paying no more than lip service to the 'history' of the 1920s are also awarded high marks because, by creating a believable milieu for the benefit of their characters and readers, they successfully establish an accurate if moderate atmosphere or 'mood' that seems to have pervaded society at large. In this sense, it is vital that,

"New York City had all the iridescence of the beginning of the world." 8

As such, it should not be seen as a problem to solve, but as an experience to share. In MANHATTAN TRANSFER, for example, Dos Passos establishes the social surroundings of a,

"... modern Manhattan, [which], glittering and water-girt though it is, has become a sign and symbol of a mechanized society. Dos Passos ... puts his society's institutions to the acid test, and Dos Passos the historian records that, as the character of Jimmy Herf concludes, New York's inhabitants are doomed more surely year after year to a treadmill of sex and money." 9

It is all the more relevant therefore, that B.H.Gelfant, in her evaluation of the American City Novel, suggests that Dos Passos,

"city is registered immediately in its color, odor, din, and gaudy brilliance. And as it comes to life it is its own indictment." 10

8. Cited in Edmund Wilson, (ed.), THE CRACK-UP: F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, (New York, 1956), p.25.

9. Walter B. Rideout, THE RADICAL NOVEL IN THE UNITED STATES, 1900-1954, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), p.158.

10. Blanche Houseman Gelfant, THE AMERICAN CITY NOVEL, (Norman, 1970), p.145.

Nonetheless, as the old lady suggests to Bud Korpenning during the course of the novel, New York City is fully representative and also distinctive, a point made when she says,

"This is certainly the city for everyone being from somewhere else." 11

At once the hero and the villain, therefore, the peculiar strain of the life style New York City promotes is also suggested in MANHATTAN TRANSFER when George Baldwin admits that,

"The terrible thing about having New York go stale on you is that there's nowhere else. It's the top of the world. All we can do is go round and round in a squirrel cage." 12

The critical connection between the American Dream and New York City per se and as a symbol of urbanism is, therefore, that just as New York City is the 'top of the world,' so, too, the American Dream is implanted in an environment that has the potential for exposing the most dramatic extremes in both the successes and the failures within the Dream. Indeed, when it is united with the American Dream, New York City represents and has generated the formal and numerous introduction into modern chaos. In doing so, it precipitated and promoted an intellectual if not a largely general disenchantment with the quality of the American Dream.¹³

11. Dos Passos, op.cit., p.64.

12. Ibid, p.220.

13. The decade's expatriate's may exemplify this point. For further reference see Malcolm Cowley, EXILE'S RETURN: A LITERARY ODYSSEY OF THE 1920s, (New York, 1972).

In addition, it reflected another feature of the decade, the creation of intellectual communities centered around universities in New York City during the period. In turn, this developed an attractive base for internationalism, and in the same way that World War One reputedly changed America from a debtor to a creditor nation, it also swung the pendulum as far as intellectual life was concerned. Hitherto, many of America's intellectuals had been preoccupied with Europe. In the wake of the 1920s, however, the United States of America was showing signs of becoming the intellectual leader of the world.¹⁴

Indeed, in depicting New York City as a subject in which what is seen is real, it further establishes the city as a valid point of comparison.¹⁵ With or without the aid of the expatriates, therefore, American authors established that they no longer had need to apologise for the unsuitability or even the suitability of their literary settings,¹⁶ and, in this sense, it would be valid to argue that American writing came of age as the American city was represented by and depicted in the literature of the 1920s.

14. I am indebted to Professor Barry Karl of the University of Chicago, Illinois, for first suggesting this to me. The responsibility for its appearance in this thesis is entirely my own.

15. This thesis could be greatly enhanced by any student who, for example, surveyed the 1920s and the position occupied by the American Dream during the period from a 'rural' vantage.

16. For further reference to this vital point see Robert F. Stowell, PROBLEMS AND METHODOLOGY IN THE COMPILATION OF AN ATLAS FOR AMERICAN LITERATURE: HENRY THOREAU: A CASE STUDY unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Canterbury, (Christchurch, 1971).

It is interesting, therefore, that the characters gathered together in the seven novels under review seem to regard New York City as a special place, and, as such, it would be misleading to suggest that the atmosphere and potential of this particular city would be equally pronounced in other American cities, a point applicable to the American Dream as well. Chicago illustrates the issue at hand, and can not be safely ignored. However, as registered in another section of this thesis,¹⁷ Chicago was more the center of the Midwest and less the heart of the nation. Indeed, this point is an essential element in THE GREAT GATSBY, when Nick Carraway posits that, in some senses, the novel is about Westerners in general and their "deficiency in common which made [them] subtly unadaptable to Eastern life"¹⁸ in particular.

In the absence of a formal comparative body of literature,¹⁹ however, it is difficult to evaluate with any certainty whether or not the novels in this thesis would have been as powerful as they are if they had been set beyond the boundaries of New York City. Suffice it to say, therefore, that as the uniqueness and the representativeness of New York City emerges at once during

17. See Chapter One, footnote 137 of this thesis.

18. Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.183.

19. This supports if not increases the need for a companion study of the American Dream in the 1920s that is based on a platform other than New York City.

the course of the selected novels, it is safe to argue that their total impact would ultimately, at least, have been different.

The most important factor is, however, that surveyed en toto,²⁰ the novels register a chilling decline in the historical fortunes of the American Dream during the 1920s, thereby suggesting the distinctiveness of the decade as well as its overall position in American history. In this sense, the traditional perspective of the period has been something of a hoax. Indeed, the novels show, for example, that many of the changes attributed to the decade had in fact preceded the 1920s without fuss or fanfare, a point equally valid in the dissipation of the American Dream. As a result, the people of the decade could not remain giddy in the Ford and flapper sense once the automobile's tyre had burst, thus grinding the symbolic vehicle of the period to a halt. The important factor that emerges, therefore, is that the element of hope rests in its repairability.

Bearing in mind James Baldwin's warning that novels or works of art tend to reveal what is, in effect, "more likely to be a symptom of our tension rather than an examination of it,"²¹ the novels studied in this thesis

20. No one novel in this thesis can be deemed singularly 'representative' of the American 1920s. This dislodges THE GREAT GATSBY from its widely acknowledged but inappropriate status as the decade's distinctive novel. Indeed, the animation of characters sufficiently inside the decade to see it stripped of its surface glamour and peopled by uniques is gained as the girl whose voice was full of money is made more credible when in the company of a boy whose voice was fully devoid of it.

21. James Baldwin, NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME: MORE NOTES OF A NATIVE SON, (London, 1969), p.22.

form the progressive chain of an increasingly debilitated national dream, and collectively indicate that America was a desert and could no longer be considered an Eden. What was once Paradise was now Wasteland, and this conclusion evokes the ultimate paradox of the American nation: as Hofstadter has stated it,

"the United States was the only country
in the world which began with perfection
and aspired to progress." 22

22. Richard Hofstadter cited by Lawrence Levine in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, (eds.), THE AMERICAN NOVEL AND THE NINETEEN TWENTIES, (London, 1971), p.38.

APPENDIX A : THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The 'Harlem Renaissance' has been deliberately excluded from the main body of this thesis because the 'New Negro' was equivocal: at once self-consciously African and rejuvenated in terms of quantitative and qualitative literary output. Because of the various meanings of the 'Renaissance' it is impossible to select a representative author. In the case of Carl Van Vechten, for example, the author of Nigger Heaven was an operative agent and patron of the movement, yet is dismissed by Robert Bone as a literary nonentity. The reading list that follows is not exhaustive and is intended solely as a guide for further reference.

ALLEN, Walter. THE BIG CHANGE: AMERICA TRANSFORMS ITSELF, 1900-1950. (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 271 pages. In Chapter 10, part 5, Allen discusses the 'Renaissance' in terms of assimilation and the acceptance by American Whites of American Blacks in the form of the following representatives; Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ralph Bunche, Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella. Allen's interpretation is uneven, lacks detachment, and, in many senses, is a 'whitewash.' Allen may be a colourful chronicler: but he is inaccurate, perhaps irresponsible, in both formulation and conclusion.

APPEL, John L. "American Negro and Immigrant Experiences: Similarities and Differences." THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume XVIII, Number 1, (Spring, 1966), pp.95-103. With the caution that all comparisons are inexact, Appel proceeds to claim that Black Americans have been presented with the paradox of having lower status than newly-arrived white immigrants who are not as yet citizens of the United States. Harlem is depicted as an urban unit in which the Black American, with a prolonged tradition of pariah status, forms a permanent subproletariat. The 'Harlem Renaissance' may, therefore, represent a rebirth of defiance, with a cultural heritage of legitimate pride as its rhetoric. In this sense, Appel concludes his well-rounded discussion by citing Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: "America is woven of many strands: ... Our fate is to become one, and yet many - this is not prophecy but description." (page 103).

APTHEKER, Joseph, & Robert Kintner. "The Negro College Student in the 1920s - Years of Preparation and Protest: An Introduction." SCIENCE AND SOCIETY, Volume XXXIII, (Spring, 1969), pp.150-167. The authors convincingly argue that in the case of Black Americans, the 1920s marked a cultural rebirth in the field of literature, in the performing arts, in scholarly publishing, and in

intellectual circles. The decade marked substantial quantitative gains by Black Americans in higher education, but that the 'system' of education was administered by and catered to the priorities of White Americans. Nonetheless, with names such as E. Franklin Frazier, William L. Hansberry, Eslanda Goode, Rudolf Mossell, Ruth Anne Fisher, Arthur H. Fauset, Bertram W. Doyle, Charles H. Houston, Sterling Brown, Harcourt A. Tynes, Aaron Douglas, W. A. Hinton, Raymond P. Alexander, Hubert T. Delany, Roy Wilkins, Benjamin Quarles, W. Allison Davis, Myles A. Paige, Horace M. Bon, Ira Reid, William Montague Cobb, Abraham L. Harris, Charles Drew, Ralph Bunche, Gwendolyn Bennett, Jessie Fauset, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen as supporters of the 'Renaissance', there is every indication that the Black generation of the 1920s would be far from silent. Indeed, their cultural upsurge suggested that the Dark World of DuBois was no longer content merely to submit.

BALDWIN, James. 'The Discovery of What it Means to be an American.' in his NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME: MORE NOTES OF A NATIVE SON, (London: Transworld Publishers Ltd., 1969), pp. 17-23. Baldwin's is a latter day and more successful attempt to answer the questions posed by the 'New Negroes' of the 1920s and 1930s. Baldwin has had the advantage of expatriation which he successfully used to define what it meant not solely to be Black, but to be American. Baldwin's essay is, therefore, a useful comparative frame of reference linking the self-awareness of the 'Renaissance' to the current status of Black Americans. Baldwin's perspective is neither average nor typical. It differs, for example, from the radical separateness suggested in Eldridge Cleaver's SOUL ON ICE, (London: Pantheon Books, 1970); from E. U. Essien-Udom's BLACK NATIONALISM: THE RISE OF THE BLACK MUSLIMS IN THE U.S.A. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966); and Frantz Fanon's BLACK SKINS WHITE MASKS, (London: Grenada Publishing Ltd., 1970).

BOARD OF EDUCATION, CITY OF NEW YORK, THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN HISTORY, Curriculum Bulletin, 1964-1965, Series number 4, 158 pages. This is a competent assessment of the Negro's position in the period between 1918 and 1945. It is useful in tracing the fortunes of the 'Renaissance', and, as is the case with Huggin's text, it includes prominent cultural as well as solely literary figures.

BONE, Robert A. "The Negro Renaissance," in Joan Hoff Wilson (ed.), THE TWENTIES: THE CRITICAL ISSUES, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), pp. 118-128. Bone should be counted as one of the 'Renaissance's' foremost authorities. In this excellent article he makes the vital distinction between the 'New Negro' as

a literary movement and as a racial attitude. Bone further suggests that, during the 'Lost Generation', American Blacks were attempting to be firstly Negroes, and, secondly Americans.

COOPER, Wayne, "Claude McKay and the New Negro of the 1920s," PHYLON, Volume XXV, number 3, (Fall, 1964), pp.153-168. Cooper informatively asserts that the 'New Negro' was best defined by a new confidence that was not the sole province of literary figures. Claude McKay is said to be important because he was a natural man determined to be himself in an age of conformity.

CRONON, Edmund David. "Black Moses: Marcus Garvey and Garveyism," in Barton J. Bernstein & Allen J. Matusow (eds.) TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA: RECENT INTERPRETATIONS, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969), pp.175-202. Cronon concerns himself with Garvey's insistence that the roots of Black culture in the United States were firmly grounded upon African soil. Garvey called for pride and unity under the banner of Blackness. He demanded a Negro Deity in religion, urged a return to Africa, and called for an unequivocal reversal against assimilation. Cronon holds that Garvey was a radical who was important to both the 'Renaissance' and the overall tradition of Black Americans. Cronon rounds off his treatise with an informative reading guide, page 202.

DOWNES, Randolph C. "Negro Rights and the White Backlash in the Campaign of 1920," OHIO HISTORY, Volume LXXI, (Spring/Summer, 1966), pp.85-107. Although Downes' central concern is the title of his article, it is important to note that, if not a culturally cohesive group, the body of American Blacks in Northern cities formed a significant voting block and called for an up-grading of their American status. This demand was defused by Harding's middle-of-the-road stand. Also, concurrent with cultural rebirth, was the appointment of American Blacks to high places in local Republican councils - on the understanding, it goes without saying, that such Blacks would not go 'too far.'

FEIN, Charlotte Phillips. "Marcus Garvey: His Opinions About Africa," JOURNAL OF NEGRO EDUCATION, Volume XXXIII, Number 4, (1964), pp.446-449. Fein concentrates upon the historical impact of Garveyism as well as the ideas and opinions of the man himself. Garvey's importance, in this study, was his success (redemption to Africa notwithstanding), as broadcast in the New World manifesto. Garvey became the established spokesman and leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey did not receive the support of the 'intellectuals' of the

'Renaissance', but, from 1916 onwards, the U.N.I.A. and the New World used Harlem as the pivot for disseminating the respectability of African culture, and, given equality, the perfectibility of American Blacks. Garvey and Garveyism are 'research opportunities' and there is need for a fresh assessment of the man and his movement.

GLAZER, Nathan. "Negroes and Jews: The New Challenge to Pluralism," COMMENTARY, Volume XXXVIII, (1964), pp.29-34. Aimed at the 1940s through to the 1960s, Glazer's article also serves to remind critics that anti-Semitism has been used to foster unity amongst Black Americans. Glazer possibly overstates his case, but there is a valid applicability where the Harlemit of the 1920s is concerned. This legitimacy is contained in Glazer's citation of James Baldwin's: "just as a society must have a scapegoat, so hatred must have a symbol. Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew." (page 29). The assertion that Glazer presents through Baldwin is provocative and represents one aspect of the 'Renaissance' that deserves further attention.

HUGGINS, Nathan Irvin. HARLEM RENAISSANCE, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 343p. Huggins must be regarded as the 'Renaissance's' standard authority. He holds that the 'movement' was complex and distinctive, and claims that the 1920s was the true starting point for Black self-awareness. The 'New Negro' was not created during the period, but his future was. A further caution is that Harlem should be de-emphasised vis-à-vis an increased emphasis on Black self-awareness. The importance of this work lies in its deep, broad treatment of the 'Renaissance' as a cultural entity: both the 'Renaissance' and the decades must be viewed within their own terms. An informative bibliographical guide to the 'Renaissance' is provided pp.310-324.

JACKSON, Kenneth T. THE KU KLUX KLAN IN THE CITY, 1915-1930, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 326p. Although devoted to Klan activities in urban areas sui generis Jackson's work has the importance of assessing the position of the urban Negro as well as other groups subject to Klan activities. Jackson clearly concludes that the urban Negro was a force to be reckoned with, and reinforces the argument that Negroes in Northern cities during the 1920s formed a cohesive and distinct unit.

MOYNIHAN, Daniel P. (ed.) URBAN AMERICA: THE EXPERT LOOKS AT THE CITY, (Washington D.C.: Voice of America Forum Lectures, 1969), 373p. By concentrating upon the city as a location, Moynihan's collection suggests the distinctiveness of Harlem as well as the implications the specific unit has for the wider urban setting. This is a legitimate approach to the 'movement' and its meanings.

OSOFSKY, Gilbert. HARLEM: THE MAKING OF A GHETTO, NEGRO NEW YORK, 1890-1930, 2nd edition, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 276p. In this case Osofsky adroitly manipulates the myths and realities of Harlem as the site for a 'Renaissance'. Incisive judgments are made as to the migration of Negroes into New York City, the creation of the ghetto, and the tragedy of Harlem, slum.

OSOFSKY, Gilbert. "Symbols of the Jazz Age: The New Negro and Harlem Discovered," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume XVII, Number 2, Part 1, (Summer, 1965), pp.229-238. This develops upon Osofsky's work cited below. One of the 'Renaissance's' principal critics, Osofsky argues that, in literature and elsewhere, undue emphasis was given to Harlem as an 'erotic bohemia'. Instead of representing Harlem life, the 'Renaissance' romanticized it until the Depression ended the myth-world of the 1920s.

OSOFSKY, Gilbert. "Progressivism and the Negro: New York, 1900-1915," THE AMERICAN QUARTERLY, Volume XVI, Number 2, Part 1, (Summer, 1964), pp.153-168. Osofsky summarizes the Negro's pre-1915 migration into New York City. It suggests that, from the 1880s and 1890s onwards there was an increasing awareness of the need for reform and social charity in Harlem. The 1920s would be the logical culmination of this trend.

PRESIDENT'S RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON RECENT SOCIAL TRENDS, RECENT SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES, Two Volumes, (Westport, Connecticut: The Greenwood Press, 1970), 1568p. Originally published by the McGraw-Hill Book Company in 1933, RECENT SOCIAL TRENDS must be recognized as the official document of the 1920s. Although the Committee's predictions and conclusions are at times inaccurate, a genuine attempt is made to cover all aspects of American life during the 1920s. The Negro is dealt with in passing, but is spotlighted in T.J.Woofter Jr., 'The Status of Racial and Ethnic Groups', Chapter XI, pp.553-601.

RUDWICK, Elliott M. "DuBois Versus Garvey: Race Propagandists at War," JOURNAL OF NEGRO EDUCATION, Volume 28, (Fall, 1959), pp.421-430. Rudwick repeats the often asked question of what was, and was not representative, of the 'New Negro'. With a mutual ambition of cultural rebirth, DuBois and Garvey had disparate methods for achieving their goal. Rudwick's point that there was a difference between the 'mass' and 'intelligensia' of the 'Renaissance' is finely made and confirms the complexities involved in approaching the 'Renaissance'.

SHERMAN, Richard B. "Republicans and Negroes: The Lessons of Normalcy," PHYLON, Volume XXVII Number 1, (Spring, 1966) pp.63-79. Sherman substantiates Randolph Downes' claim that, hesitations, inconsistencies, and vacillations notwithstanding, Republicans were aware of the voting potential of Black Americans in Northern cities during the 1920s. They were a force to be reckoned with and cultivated. This recognition suggested that politicians were aware of the cohesiveness of the Black vote, for Sherman adds that Negroes yet comprised a small percentage of the total Northern population. Sherman's assessment points to Black organizations and leadership being emergent, articulate, and increasingly aggressive. In essence, these were the 'New Negroes' of 'Harlem Rediscovered'.

SHERMAN, Richard B. "The Harding Administration and the Negro: An Opportunity Lost," THE JOURNAL OF NEGRO HISTORY, Volume XLIV. (July, 1964), pp.151-168. Because of its equivocations, the Harding Administration disappointed those who had hoped for a new era in race relationships. Sherman cogently argues that the failures of the Administration stimulated Black militancy and self-consciousness during the 1920s.

SLOSSON, Preston W. THE GREAT CRUSADE AND AFTER, 1914-1928, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 486p. In Chapter 9, Slosson deals with the self-conscious blackness of Booker T. Washington, Robert R. Morton, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey. He claims that the 'New Negro' was potentially in a better economic position than before. This was, in part, a result of the Northward migration of Black Americans from rural, predominantly Southern areas, to the cities of the Northeast. Harlem is depicted as the most successful and famous coloured urban community, a unit that, by 1928, boasted a black population of 170,000. Slosson's assessment of the 'Renaissance' is brief, and misleadingly generalized.

SZWED, John F. (ed.), BLACK AMERICANS, (Washington, D.C.: Voice of America Forum Lectures, 1970), 320p. This is a comprehensive collection of articles in which experts direct their attention to various focal points in the history and culture of Black Americans. The collection is a useful aid to the chronological relevance of the 'Harlem Renaissance'.

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